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OR,

THE PRIDE OF THE EVERGLADES.

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NEW YORK:
BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
98 WILLIAM STREET.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1878, by
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THE WARRIOR PRINCESS.

CHAPTER I.

THE COMING OF DE SOTO.

THE New World in its early day. The scene opens upon that level stretch of country along the shores of Tampa Bay, upon the Florida coast, a land which, in its luxuriant vegetable growth, its magnificent climate, and luscious fruits, might well vie with any region of the sunny South. The grand foliage of the live oak contrasted with the more vivid hues of creeping vine and trailing moss, while the blossom-laden trees breathed a spicy fragrance. Well might the early navigator, brave old Ponce de Leon, give it the name of Florida—the "Land of Flowers!"

On the 12th day of May, 1539, two persons stood upon a headland near the entrance to the bay, looking out toward the sea. They were man and woman, and at a glance it was easy to see that they held high rank in the nation to which they belonged. The male was an Indian of the pure blood, a man of giant frame, with a graceful, sinewy form, and limbs which would have done credit to a son of Anak. His dress was of light material, suited to the climate in which he lived, a sort of tunic, leggins of doeskin, beaded moccasins, and feathered head-dress. Over all was thrown a blanket of woven grass, fancifully adorned with images of beast and bird, after the fashion of this rude people. His face was noble beyond description, and his dark eye roved over the distant horizon with a look of calm intelligence, not unmixed with dread, for from the calm sea over which his glance was cast he expected the coming of evil to his nation.

The only arms he bore were a bow, hatchet, and arrows. One hand rested carelessly upon a shield of tanned leather, doubled and hardened until it would resist the thrust even of the Spanish spear.

But the woman !

A young girl, of wonderful beauty, with a complexion no darker than that of the Moorish maidens of her day. Her hair was black, it is true, but it had none of the coarseness and stiffness characteristic of Indian hair in general. It waved and glistened in the sun, dropping to her waist in magnificent profusion. Her eye was dark, piercing, and full of enthusiasm ; her lips, just parted by her fragrant breath, were ripe and red. The delicate hands and feet, the finely-chiseled features, and the circlet of gold, rich with pearls, bespoke her of the best blood in the land. But, strangest of all, she was armed as a warrior, and seemed to wear her weapons as one who well knew how to use them. Her bow was as long as that of her companion, the quiver as full, while a shield lay upon the ground beside her, and both hands grasped the polished handle of a Spanish battle-ax, the blade of which rested upon the earth.

"Why do you gaze so earnestly toward the sea, Vitachuco?" she asked, in a musical voice. "What evil can come from there?"

They used the language of the Seminoles, the then dominant race in Florida, but there was something in the accent of the girl which did not seem pure, as if she had at one time known another language.

"Can you ask me that question, Ozemba?" he said, in a mournful voice. "Have you forgotten the day when the iron-coated white men first landed on our shores? Do you not know that they never forget, and that their white-winged canoes can bear them over many waves to the country of their choice?"

"But Vitachuco is cacique in his own land, and the other caciques bow to his will. If the white men come in their white-winged canoes, are there not warriors enough in Vitachuco to meet them on the shore, and send them back from whence they came?"

She half-lifted the ax as she spoke, her dark eyes flashing with the spirit of battle, and the cacique looked at her admiringly.

"You speak well, Ozemba," he replied, "but, the white men are very brave, and our arrows fly away harmless from

their iron coats. Man by man we are equal to them, in the arms which the Master of Life has given us, but we can not fight against them on the shore. Their ships bear the thunder, and when it sounds, the Indians fall dead. Look !”

He raised his hand and pointed backward at the ocean of green leaves in their rear.

“The pathless swamps will be our fortification, the Master of Life will strengthen our arms. Woe to the white man if he does set foot on the land !”

“See, Vitachuco !” cried the warrior maiden, suddenly. “Are my eyes blinded by the sun, or is yonder what we fear ?”

Far away on the distant line of the horizon they beheld a glittering spot, white as snow. Vitachuco bent forward and for half an hour neither spoke, so intently was their gaze fixed upon the object of their dread. It grew larger moment by moment, until at last there could be no doubt. It was a white sail, heading for their coast ! Vitachuco uttered a wild cry of rage, and catching up a handful of sand, hurled it toward the coming ship.

“Away from the land you would curse, sons of the bad spirit !” he screamed. “Woe to the land and its people when the big canoes come over the sea !”

The first sail now had company, and in the course of an hour they made out no less than eleven vessels, hovering upon the verge of the horizon. What could such a sight mean upon this coast ? It meant that *Hernando de Soto*, unappalled by the dangers of the enterprise and the unknown land he must penetrate, was coming to make himself a name which must live for ages.

The cacique lifted to his mouth a bone whistle and blew a shrill call, and as if by magic a hundred armed warriors leaped up from the cover of the ferns and moss and surrounded the pair. The Indian tribes can not show a race of men more resolute or brave than the Florida Indians, as they were when De Soto landed on our shores. Powerful of limb, untrammelled by heavy, warlike gear, fleet of foot, and actuated by a love of country which is grand and noble, they were ready to oppose their naked breasts to the mail-clad legions of Spain. So they gathered about Vitachuco and Ozemba, and as he pointed to the coming sails a cry of hor-

ror and execration broke from every lip. They had seen the coming of Ponce de Leon, of Pamphillo de Narvaez, and their men, and many had battled with them upon the coast. They hated the Spaniards with an intensity which was not hard to understand when the cruel conduct of the early Spanish navigators is fully known.

"We see them, the white slayers," screamed a tall warrior, shaking his bow at the coming ships. "The Seminoles will lap blood; they will drink it as a stream fresh from the veins of the white men."

"It is good, Hurza," replied Vitachuco. "We shall, indeed, swim in blood before the foot of the destroyer shall be set upon our land. Hurza, speed to the cacique of Hirrihigua, and tell him that Vitachuco sends him greeting and calls upon him to arm. Vando, you to the chief Mucuzco, who loves the white man too well, because he has one in his tribe. Tell him that if he does not arm against the Spaniard, Vitachuco will come with his warriors to ask the reason. Away!"

In the same manner he sent fleet-footed messengers by paths which none but an Indian could tread to warn the other powerful chieftains in the land, and when he sent his commons the others must obey. When the messengers had all departed about fifty men still clustered about him, looking fiercely at the coming ships of the Spaniards, and gripping their bows with the energy of intense rage.

Still the ships came nearer, and any one who understood naval affairs would have seen that it was the most magnificent fleet ever sent upon such a mission, consisting of eight great ships, the best which could be built, a caravel, and two brigantines, as dispatch boats, for De Soto intended to keep up his communication with Cuba, his base of supplies. At the peak of each ship fluttered the royal banner—the flag of the allied houses of Old Spain, and as the fleet headed into the magnificent bay, the puff of smoke from the bow of each was followed by the dull report of the cannon, a sound which appalled the Indians, but Ozemba started and looked eagerly outward.

"I have heard that sound before, Vitachuco?" she said, fiercely.

He looked at her with a glance almost of hatred, but did not reply.

"The sound rings in my ears yet," she murmured, "And the banner; have I seen the banner which they rear?"

"Away!" cried Vitachuco, grasping her by the wrist. "Girl, beware, for the power which created you a princess of the tribe can doom you to the stake. Hence, I say, we can not fight them here."

He waved his hand, and as if by magic the Indians disappeared, sinking into places of concealment as "Clan Alpine," vanished at the beck of Roderic Dhu, and Vitachuco turning on his heel, after shaking his hand threateningly at the coming ships, plunged into the dark recesses of the swamp, closely followed by Ozemba, whose eyes were turned in a strange, questioning way toward the ships. What was there in the sound of the booming cannon and in the ensign of Spain to arouse these feelings in her bosom? She alone could tell.

The fleet came on slowly, following in each other's wake, the lighter brigantines sounding as they proceeded, lest the larger craft should fall into a trap. The sails came down rapidly, the anchors were dropped, and the fleet came to anchor in the beautiful bay, while the men sprung into the shrouds to "stow away," and at the same time take the opportunity of glancing at the beautiful land which they had come to seize. Even the stately hidalgos, whom nothing could move, standing on the high, raised decks of the ships, looked out benignly at the coveted prize.

It was a gallant company of the bravest and best of the Spanish blood—men who, from the mere love of wild adventure, had left their lives of indolence and ease in the old world, and put on their most approved arms to follow the banner of Hernando de Soto. They knew that he was a gallant man, and his success in other expeditions made them hope that he would lead them safely through the perils before them. Happen what might, they were ready to abide the issue.

The Governor was standing upon the quarter-deck of his flagship, leaning upon the terrible sword, which had in other days hewed a way for its master through the swarming

legions of his enemies. His noble brow was calm and serene, for, although he knew the danger of the enterprise, he was ready to dare all for the glory of Old Spain. As his eyes rested upon the green savannas, a smile came to his face, and he called to his side a handsome young cavalier, who was standing near at hand.

"Garcia La Vega," he said.

The young man advanced, doffed his plumed bonnet, and bowed in silence. He awaited the orders of his superior.

"Prepare the Governor barge. I would land in the country which I am to govern by the grace of God and their supreme majesties Ferdinand and Isabel. Give your orders accordingly. Let the troop of your uncle, Basalisco La Vega, be also ready to disembark, for we may need their aid."

"I hear your commands, excellency. Is there any thing more?"

"It is my pleasure that not a hand be lifted against the people of this land until I give the word. Others, who have gone before me, have incensed the natives by dragging some away into captivity, and they will remember it. Where is the Indian whom I purchased in Cuba?"

"He is below, your excellency. We feared that the sight of his native land might induce him to desert us."

"Even an untutored savage, then, loves his country, Garcia," said De Soto, with a smile. "Tell my servant, Pedro, to bring the Indian upon deck, and then haste to perform my other commands."

The young cavalier hastened away to obey the behest of his leader, and five minutes later the busy sound of preparation rung through the ship. The troops of Basalisco La Vega were arming themselves, and the seamen were clearing away the boats, which were stowed on deck, when a man came up the companionway, leading a stately savage, in whose fierce eye the determination of his race was apparent. The Indian did not raise his head, however, until he reached the deck where De Soto stood.

"Asenio," said De Soto, "look yonder and tell us what you see."

The Indian raised his fierce eye and looked toward the

shore, and then for the first time comprehended his situation. He had been forced below and heavily ironed before the land was in view, and, knowing nothing of ships, he had not dreamed that they would come to anchor in a spot which he knew so well. Asenio had been torn from this spot by the hands of Ponce de Leon, and as he saw the land, he uttered a wild cry of joy, and stretched out his manacled hands toward the shore.

"Do you love your country, then, Asenio?" said De Soto.

"Love it!" There was more than love in the expression of that savage face—a *loration* rather! The dark face was lighted up, the eyes gleamed with a strange light, and he strained at his bonds until he nearly burst them.

"You need not answer," said De Soto, kindly. "It was wrong to tear you from a country you love so well; and to show you that I think so, Pedro, cast off his chains. They shall never again disgrace the limbs of a free cacique."

"But, excellenza, he is so savage—"

"Silence!" cried De Soto. "Cast off his chains."

The captive had but imperfectly understood the orders of the Governor, nor did he quite believe it until the chains dropped from his hands.

"You set me free, great master?" he cried, in a hollow voice. "Do you not make sport with the love of the poor Indian for his native land?"

"No, you are free. Go to your people and tell them that Hernando De Soto does not come to them in enmity. He comes rather as the apostle of good, to teach them the right path, and not to lift weapons against them unless they first offend."

The eye of the slave had lost its wild glare. He fell at De Soto's feet and clasped his knees.

"Great master," he said, humbly, "until this day Asenio has only known insult and wrong at the hands of the Spaniard. To-day, he thought only of revenge; now he is your friend, and he can do much. Am I free to go?"

"Yes."

Without a word the Indian turned and plunged into the water from the high deck of the ship. A moment more and

he appeared breasting the waves manfully toward the shore, nearly half a mile distant. Not a hand was raised to stay him.

CHAPTER II.

THE EMBASSADORS.

THERE was some confusion in the other ships as the Indian was seen to plunge into the water, and many arquebusiers and cross-bowmen caught up their weapons and prepared to fire, but a signal was run up at the mizzen of the flag-ship which all understood, and save a hasty bolt or two, which flew wide of the mark, not a shot was fired.

"Clear away a boat and accompany him, Vasquez," cried the Governor, waving his hand. "Do not touch him unless he shows signs of exhaustion, but on no account stop him upon reaching the shore. He is free to go where he will."

A small boat, manned by four stout rowers, was quickly in the water, following in the track of the adventurous Indian, but it was only after a struggle that they succeeded in overtaking him, although he was apparently swimming at his ease. As they came near, Vasquez, who commanded the boat, could see that the half-mile of water over which they must pass was child's play to the strong swimmer, who dashed through the water with the ease and grace of a dolphin, laughing even as he swam. The Indian of Florida is at home in the water. In his strange place of abode it becomes necessary for him to cross many bayous and swamp lakes, and at the same time defend himself from the alligators with which these waters are infested. As a natural consequence, to be an active swimmer is not only necessary, but absolutely essential, and their lessons in the art are learned early in life.

"Let him go, the rascal," said Vasquez, laughing. "He will need no help from us."

But they had been ordered to follow him, and rowed on near at hand, and the Indian seeing that he was not followed with the design of making him a prisoner, relaxed his efforts

and swam by the side of the boat, sporting in the clear water like a fish.

"By Our Lady, savage, you are a strong swimmer," said Vasquez.

"Few of my race can equal me, and yet all know well how it is done," replied the Indian, as they neared the shore.

They struck a shallow and he began to wade and was soon standing in the water up to his thighs. Here he paused, and the crew rested on their oars and looked at him.

"I am free to go to my people?" he said. "The great master will not break his word, even to an Indian?"

"No; what Don Hernando has said, that will he do, savage. You are free to go where you will."

"It is good," said the late slave, bowing his head gravely. "Then listen to my words, and bear them to the great master. The Indians of this land are very brave, and they are many and strong. If he comes among us with his warriors, he must fight us in the places we shall choose, and he must fight well, for Hirribigua, Mucuzco and the great cacique Vitachuco, will give him no rest until the last white man has left the land. Go to your cacique and say: 'Your big canoes are here. Stay in them, and let them spread their white wings and fly back to the home of the white man. Take the "big thunder" with you, and leave the simple Indian to the land his fathers gave him; refuse, and all shall die.'"

Vasquez laughed scornfully, and the sailors echoed the laugh.

"Good savage, it is plain that you know nothing of the temper of our Spanish steel, or the power of our lances. We are not afraid of a horde of half-armed savages, and will not go back."

"Will you carry my words to the great cacique?"

"Yes, if you will have it so?"

"Then farewell, and set no foot upon our land, for the Master of Life will fight for his children, even against white men."

He hurried through the shallow water to the shore, and stood erect for a moment upon the dry land. Then, drawing his belt closer, and turning a last look upon the armed fleet, he dashed away swiftly into the interior.

De Soto had watched his course from the deck, in silence, and now, seeing that he was gone, turned to Basalisco La Vega, who had just come to report his troop in the boat, ready to make the landing.

"I would that De Narvaez and De Leon had understood better the nature of these savage men," he said. "I have made a friend to-day who may do us good service in time to come. Is your troop ready?"

"Ready and anxious to land, Sir Governor," replied Basalisco, a grizzled warrior, who had followed De Soto in many a battle.

"The horses can not land as yet," said De Soto. "We will arrange that when we have made a camp. Where is Garcia?"

"Here, your excellency," said the young cavalier, saluting. "The boat is in waiting."

De Soto followed him to the gangway, and went down into the boat waiting at the side. He was in complete armor, and looked the picture of a knight-errant, bound upon deeds of adventurous daring.

Say what we will of the Spaniards, they showed more enterprise in early discovery and adventure than any nation in their day. To them, alone, belongs the credit of bringing to the light the hidden mystery of the Atlantic, and, following in their wake, other nations seized the labor of their hands.

Among other adventurers, fit to stand beside the gallant Cortez, De Soto claims a high place. More than any other, he was actuated by noble motives, for the discovery of gold does not seem to have been his highest quest. To carry the arms of Spain into new regions, to set up the standard of the Cross, and to humanize the barbarous inhabitants, seem to have been the ends he had in view, although many of his followers were actuated by more selfish motives.

As he stepped into the boat and Garcia followed, suddenly as if by magic, from a hundred points along the shore, and upon the highest points in the interior, bale-fires sprang up, warning the savages of the coming of the foe. It was plain that the Indians were on the alert, for they remembered but too well the visits of De Leon and Narvaez, and how many of their friends had been dragged into helpless captivity in the

islands of the Antilles. One by one the fires sprung up, and as their gleam was seen, others answered them from far in the interior, calling in the tribes to defend their coast.

De Soto looked annoyed, for he had hoped for some days to rest and recruit.

"These savages are quick, Basalisco," he said. "They evidently have no love for us."

"They will love us better when they know the strength of our lances," replied the old knight.

"Too hot—too hot, Basalisco. Be ruled by me, and learn that mild and lenient measures are the best, after all, and will conquer sooner than our arms. Had it been my fate first to land upon this beautiful coast, it would have been an easy task to subdue them, but now I fear that our path will be one constant battle. It is the will of God—let us do our work."

They pushed for the shore and made a landing, but not an Indian was in sight. The bale-fires yet gleamed and were constantly springing into view at other points, and as every fire was lighted, other braves took their arms and hastened to the scene of the impending battle.

The sailors landed, and many of them rushed carelessly into the forest, to return laden with beautiful flowers, trailing moss, and wild grapes, as evidences of the beauty and fertility of the country. But the rising fires had made De Soto cautious, and he returned to his ships without suffering the troops to land.

Three days were spent in sounding, and working the ships up to a point more convenient for landing. On the morning of the fourth day, a great canoe, paddled by eight strong men, shot out of one of the numerous bayous which entered the bay, and steered boldly toward the fleet.

As it came nearer, under a sort of canopy in the stern, De Soto saw two figures, one of which he recognized as that of the slave he had set free upon the first day, now dressed in all the finery of a native chief, and bearing bow and shield, with a hatchet in his girdle. The other was Ozemba, the Warrior Princess, who had accompanied Vitachuco when the Spanish fleet first appeared.

As they neared the fleet, one of the paddlers stepped for-

ward and waved in the air a piece of white cloth, as a symbol of amity.

"Answer it," said De Soto. "They come in peace; let them be so received."

A white flag was run up at the fore-peak of the flag-ship, and the canoe advanced boldly until it rounded to under the bow of the ship.

"Where is the great cacique?" cried Asenio, in a loud voice. "Let him come forth and speak to his friends."

De Soto at once advanced, followed by a glittering retinue of his chief officers, and looked down into the canoe. He started in surprise at the strange beauty and stately bearing of Ozemba—he, who had seen the beautiful women of a dozen courts.

"Why do you come, Asenio?" he said; "and who is the beautiful maiden who is with you?"

"Ozemba is a princess of Vitachuco," replied Asenio, haughtily, "and is beloved by Vitachuco, my brother. He has sent me to you in peace before he calls out all his powers to meet you, who have been kind to the brother he loves, and who was lost but for you."

"What says Vitachuco?" asked De Soto, who had heard of the great cacique before, and knew him as his principal enemy.

"He speaks by my mouth and that of the princess, Ozemba, and says: 'Is not the world wide enough for the white man, that he should seek the land of the Indian? Vitachuco has sworn never of his own will to be friends with any white man, for he knows that they only come to rob the Indian of his rights. Let the great canoes go back over the water; Vitachuco would be at peace.'"

"It can not be," replied De Soto. "A greater than Vitachuco, or De Soto, has sent me to carry into Florida the banner of the Cross. It is a great work, and I must do it."

The chief turned and repeated the words of De Soto to the princess, who rose in a stately manner and addressed the Spanish leader. Her attitude was easy and graceful, her periods smooth and flowing, and although De Soto could not understand her words, he was struck by her lofty and impassioned gestures.

"What says the princess?" he asked.

"Ozemba says: 'When He who is greater than Vitachuco or De Soto sent the white man to these shores, did he know that the simple people who dwell here love their land as well as any white man can love his? Under the green trees of this beautiful land they have hunted the bounding deer. On the broad meadows they have planted corn, and joyed to see it ripen in the summer sun. The trees gave them fruit, the waters, fish. Here they married their wives, here their children were born and their fathers lie buried. Who, then, gave the white man the right to disturb them in the land their fathers gave them? Will not the white men go away and leave them in peace?'"

De Soto again shook his head.

"Then the white cacique is like the others who came to this shore, to steal away the warriors, their wives and children and make them plant for others in distant lands. There must be war between us if you do not go away."

Still De Soto was firm, for he felt the grandeur of his mission.

"Then take the defiance of Vitachuco!" cried Asento, in a voice of thunder. "Take it, children of a bad and cruel race. In the land of my brother we will give you enough, and send you home to your wives in the distant land. Take the defiance of Vitachuco, the cacique!"

"By our lady of succor!" cried Basalisco La Vega. "It were well to catch you malapert knave, and slit his tongue to the roots. Ho, there, Garcia, lower a boat!"

"Hold!" cried De Soto, drawing his sword. "The man who lifts his hand against these people, were he my brother, I would cleave to the jaw."

"But, your excellency—"

"Peace, I say! Who is there among you who could go home with honor if these confiding men and this princely woman were taken under the shadow of a white flag? I had better thoughts of you, Basalisco."

The old knight hung his head, for now that his first heat was over, he was indeed ashamed of what he would have done. But young Garcia had not moved.

"It would need more than the commands of my uncle to

tempt me to dishonor a flag," he cried. "As for yonder princess, I will maintain with my sword that she is noble of heart as she is beautiful of face and form. I have seen the beauties of the Spanish court, but never aught like this."

The Indians had not moved during this exciting scene—only that the chief laid his hand upon a hatchet, though he did not draw it. It was evident that he depended upon the honor of De Soto, and was not disappointed when he heard him rebuke La Vega for his ill-timed order. Ozemba, who knew but little of the Spanish tongue, had imperfectly understood the orders of La Vega, but had grasped her ax more firmly and prepared for a fray.

"Your mission is accomplished, Asenio," said De Soto. "Go in peace, and say to your chiefs that we will march through the length and breadth of this fair land. If no land is raised against us, we will injure no man, but woe to that chief who first gives the gage of battle, for we shall not decline it."

"The blood which must flow be on your head, great cacique," replied Ozemba. "We can say no more."

The head of the canoe was turned, and it darted away swiftly toward the bayou from which it had emerged, eagerly watched by the Spaniards. Garcia La Vega stood near his chief, leaning upon his sheathed sword, and watching Ozemba with a look of rapt admiration, which could not be mistaken. He started as the hand of De Soto was laid upon his shoulder.

"Art in love with this savage maid, my Garcia?" he said, laughing. "In good sooth, a cavalier might do worse."

"I know not, Sir Governor, but something in her noble face has awakened a strange interest in my breast."

"Enough; we have no time to waste. Let us prepare to land, and you shall win this noble maid if your arm is strong. To the shore!"

CHAPTER III.

THE LANDING—THE UNKNOWN KNIGHT.

THE Adelantado—the title which, as Governor of Cuba and Florida, the great captain bore—was a wise soldier, and his struggles in Peru, under the leadership of that wicked but brave man, Pizarro, had taught him the virtue of caution. The fate of De Leon and the untimely death of De Narvaez had warned him that these people were not to be trifled with, and he took every precaution in choosing a roadstead for his ships before he would suffer his men to land. This done, three hundred of the foot soldiers effected a landing, and began to make a camp. This had scarcely been done when the bale-fires again began to gleam, and literally without warning the woods were lined by a host of bowmen, and their arrows began to rattle upon the steel coats of the soldiery, while the battle-yell of the Seminoles rose high and shrill beneath the bending boughs. So sudden was the attack that the Spaniards were thrown into confusion, as, for the time being, they were literally without a competent leader—the principal officers being engaged in the work of overseeing the transportation of troops.

Thrown into confusion by the assault, the soldiers crowded down to the water's edge, and the Indians, overjoyed with the result of their attack, rushed on with fearful cries to complete their work. The air was alive with flying shafts, and the arrows of the Florida Indians were no mean weapon. So great was their power that even the steel coats of the Spaniards did not always prove a defense against them. Warned by their former conflicts with the Spanish adventurer, they aimed always at the throat, the least protected portion of a mailed man. Many of the Spaniards were desperately wounded, and, for a moment, it almost seemed that the Indians would beat the invaders in their first battle.

But De Soto saw the peril from his ship, and knew how to avoid it. His clarion voices rung out above the din of the

battle, and seven gallant cavaliers, headed by the Lieutenant-General, Vasco Porcalla, and comprising, among others, Garcia La Vega and Nuno Tobar, two of the most valiant horsemen in the expedition, forced their horses over the gang-plank into the shallow water, and reached the shore.

"Ha!" cried Garcia, fiercely, as they struggled up the bank "Fall into line, men of Spain! Shall a horde of painted savages beat us in our first battle?"

The men had only needed a *leader*, and as his clear voice was heard they began to form with the precision of old veterans, and faced about at once, marching out after the seven horsemen who were spurring up the bank. The Indians had now charged out into the open plain, armed with war-clubs and hatchets, designing to make a rush upon the soldiers huddled together upon the shore. But they saw the power of discipline and order, as the compact mass of hitherto frightened soldiery marched boldly up and took position in the plain.

The savages paused a moment in their admiration and surprise at this sudden change. While they hesitated, the arquebuses and cross-bows were leveled, and a terrible discharge burst from the Spanish ranks—the cross-bowmen kneeling in the front rank, with the arquebusiers in the rear, aiming over their heads.

That sudden discharge, coming upon them from a force which they considered beaten, threw the Indians into confusion, and many of their number bit the dust. At this moment came the battle-cry of Porcalla, and with six gallant spearmen behind him, he charged into the ranks of the Indians, who received them with a flight of arrows, which rattled harmlessly away from the steel coats of the cavaliers.

The Indians began to see the uselessness of this mode of attack and aimed at the horses, which were not protected like their masters, and so great was the power of their bows, that two arrows aimed at the horse of Porcalla pierced him through and through, stretching the noble steed dead upon the plain. As the rider struggled up, incumbered by his armor, the Indians swarmed about him like bees, and although the old knight defended himself gallantly, it seemed for a moment that he must fall under the terrible blows of his en-

emies. But, clearing a circle with his sword, he was suddenly assailed by a light but active warrior, clad like himself in steel from head to foot, and wielding a battle-ax!

Porcalla raised his buckler to defend his head, astounded by the apparition of an armed knight fighting in the ranks of the savages. The keen ax descended with a force which beat down his guard, and as the ax was whirled aloft again, and while the arm of the old knight was too much weakened by the force of the last blow to interpose an effectual defense, he gave himself up for lost, when Nuno Tobar and Garcia burst suddenly into the midst of the fray, cutting down an Indian at every blow, and the sword of Garcia turned aside the ax which would have slain the lieutenant-general.

The Unknown turned like a tiger upon Garcia, and dealt him a blow upon the head-piece which made him reel backward, scattering his plumes upon the wind, and the strings of the head piece were broken, leaving him bareheaded to meet the second stroke!

The ax was already lifted, and the blow about to descend, when the unknown warrior saw the face of his adversary. He started back and dropped the blade of the ax as he saw that Garcia was too much stunned to defend himself, and cried out in the Indian tongue:

"Strike him not, Seminoles! Let him go free!"

Without adding another word, the strange warrior turned upon Nuno Tobar, who was rushing to the aid of his friend, and buried his ax to the eye in his horse's brain. He had hardly done so when he was borne away in the rush of the Indians, who were giving way before the lances and swords of the mail-clad men, and the Spaniards saw him disappear in the forest, wildly calling to the Indians to turn back and strike once more at the invaders. His entreaty was in vain, and the Spaniards were masters of the field, but at what a cost!

Seven men had been slain outright among the foot soldiers, who were not so perfectly armed as the horsemen. Over thirty were wounded, and two so desperately that they died that night. Two horses had been killed, and to them the loss of a horse was almost as great a misfortune as if a man had fallen, for the loss could not be made good. The In-

dians knew the value of the animal and feared him greatly, and in all their battles directed their arrows at these noble animals more often than the men, knowing that, from them, they had most to fear.

Over eighty of the savages had been slain, chiefly by the swords and lances of the horsemen. Of all that number only one was found alive, and he was too weak to plunge a weapon into his own heart, else he would never have been taken, and he resisted the efforts of the leech to dress his wound. One of the slaves who had been brought from Cuba as interpreter was hurried forward and ordered to speak to him.

"Warrior," said the slave, speaking in his own language, "do you wish to live that you may fight again for your chief?"

"Go—you are a dog," replied the wounded brave. "Do you not wear the chains of the white man, and are you not his dog? How dare you look into the eye of a brave?"

"I am not here because I love the white man," replied the slave. "I am here as was Asenio, whom the great cacique set free, but my master will not give me liberty. Look; in a few minutes I shall escape, and you shall see me fighting against the Spaniard, whom I hate."

"Ha!" whispered the wounded brave, "you speak good words, but are they not spoken with a double tongue?"

"No, warrior; my tongue is not forked. Let the medicine-man look to your hurt and he will make you strong. Then we will escape together and fight against these white dogs."

"What does he say?" demanded Garcia, suspiciously. "Look to yourself, slave, if you dare to play us false."

"He says that he feared that the white medicine-man had come to put poison in his blood and kill him. He no longer fears, and the medicine-man may do his work."

As if to make his words good, the warrior lay passive while the leech attended to his hurt, which was a spear-thrust through the right shoulder. Garcia commanded that he should be carried to the rear, while he turned and picked up his battered head piece.

"By my faith, Nani," he said, turning to his gallant com-

panion, who was looking mournfully at his slain horse. "Yonder warrior, whoever he may be, is well skilled in the use of the ax."

"In good sooth I must agree with you, Garcia," replied the young cavalier, sadly. "Look at my horse, his head cloven like an egg-shell. If that blow had lighted upon my head, the little bruises I have would have been of small use to me."

"I have a token of his handiwork here, Nuno," said the young man, laughing as he showed his head-piece. "Mother of Mercy! Had not the strings broken I should not be alive to tell the tale. My head sings yet with the force of the blow."

"Porealla does not love it over much," said Nuno Tobar. "The old knight has my place, because the Adelantado believes the tale which was told against me in Havana. But, Garcia, on my faith as a man and gentleman, that story was false. The Donna is my wife, and if I fall in this wild land, after times may do me justice. I never wronged her, on my soul I"

Enough, Nuno, enough. The Donna is a noble lady, and I was sorry to see your parting at the *mole*. But if you leave a young bride behind you, has not the Adelantado done the same?"

"I care more for the loss of his esteem than my loss of rank," replied Tobar. "I love him dearly, for he is a gallant gentleman, when it is joy to follow. If I could once more win his love, Porealla might keep my place and welcome, for I only ask to fight beside him."

Nuno Tobar had been appointed lieutenant-general of the forces while they were yet in Spain. At Havana, for a fancied insult to Isabella de Gazman, a ward of De Soto, he had been expelled from the rank, although he indignantly denied the accusation, and to prove his word good, married the lady, who loved him dearly.

When Porealla took his place, and Tobar was at liberty to depart, he would not do it with a blot upon his name. So, bidding his young bride farewell, he sailed from Havana as a simple captain, leading his own men, leaving his young bride to the care of De Soto's noble wife.

But the Adelantado believed the story of his guilt, and Nuno had not yet won back his lost regard. Watching the battle from the ships, and satisfied to let his younger captains win honor, De Soto had seen him fighting valiantly, and his heart warmed toward his former friend, but he was not the man to forgive such an act as that of which he believed Totur guilty.

"He is brave, at least," he muttered, "and it is to his honor that he strikes such blows to aid the man who has taken his place in the army. Basalisco, let the trumpets sound the signal for recall, for some of our hot young heads do not understand that it is ill work to bar the way of a *flying* enemy. We have done enough to teach the villains a lesson."

The blare of the trumpet, sounding the recall, brought back those of the cavaliers who would have followed the Indians into the forest, where they would, without doubt, have been cut off in detail in the unknown passes.

Nuno and Garcia came back on foot, Garcia leaning heavily upon the shoulder of his friend, for he had not yet fully recovered from the blow he had received. On the way, they were met by a page, who cast a quick, anxious glance at Nuno.

"Are you hurt, my master?" he said, eagerly.

"Not in the least, Pedro," replied the cavalier. "You may set your heart at rest. What! your cheek is pale and your lip trembles, my good lad. I fear that you will not be able to bear the hardships of this life."

"You wrong me, my master," replied the boy, eagerly. "If I am pale, it is for you, for what could I say to my cousin if you were hurt?"

He was a handsome boy, slightly built, dressed in the gay garb of the page of that day. His hair was cut short in order to bear the light steel head-piece, which even he must bear on the march, although at present he only wore a hat with a drooping feather, which was pulled low upon his brow."

"A pretty lad, by my faith," said Garcia. "You are always in luck, Nuno; where did you pick him up?"

"In Havana; he is a cousin to my wife."

"I thought so, for the likeness is really wonderful. Were it not for his dark complexion—but tush! what am I think-

ing of? I suppose your wife gave you the pretty lad as a keepsake, that you might remember her."

"She sent him to me with a letter, just before the ship sailed, and a prayer that I would keep him near me and guard him for her sake. The boy loves me dearly, and because he is of her blood and has last touched her hand, I love him as well. Did the Adelantado send you to me, Pedro?"

"Yes; he orders you to take charge of the camp, if Porcalle is hurt, and to send Garcia La Vega to him with a report of the killed and wounded."

"He trusts me where *fighting* is to be done," said Nuno, bitterly. "I thank him for it. Garcia, you have heard the order; make out your report and carry it to him."

The two friends parted, Nuno, accompanied by his page, going toward the camp, while Garcia, who knew the losses on both sides, repaired to the ship.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SWAMP CONCLAVE

A SWAMP island in the everglades, bowered in by creeping vine and moss, and the dark green foliage of the live-oak. The turf is soft, green and elastic under the foot, and a pleasant fragrance is wafted from the surrounding blossoms—the sweet blossoms of the "Flowery Land."

The island is silent, now, save the songs of birds. The alligator splashes in the bayous, the terrapin drops with a sullen sound from the half-immersed logs, and the moccasin-snake crawls slowly from the tussocks. It is a strange scene, found only in the South.

The silence is broken suddenly by the entrance of a human figure through one of the intricate paths. The night has come on, and his form is barely distinguishable in the gloom of the place. As he moves about he collects billets of wood and branches of fallen trees, and lays them in a heap in the center of the island. Beneath the pile he collects a quantity

of dry tinder, and the sparks of a flint are seen to drop, one by one, in rapid succession, upon the little heap. It ignites, and a tiny blaze springs up, which he feeds dextrously with dry leaves and small twigs. The blaze grows higher, and begins to touch the great heap; then springs up rapidly, shooting a column of bright flame toward the zenith.

Now we can distinguish faces by the bright glare, and see that the solitary man is Vitachuco, the cacique. His stern, Roman-like face shows nothing of the agony of his soul, though he knows that the Indians have been beaten in their first battle, although inflicting great loss upon their foes. Still he works on, and rears the pile higher and higher, until the flame almost touches the lower branches of the trees, and then only rising now and again to fling another billet upon the flames, he sits down to wait, for he knows that the Indians will gather at the signal from the appointed place of meeting.

He has not long to wait, for, one by one, dark figures begin to steal into the island, many of them bearing upon their persons the marks of a desperate conflict. They are lately come from that bloody field in which they first tried the strength of the Spaniards and learned what a powerful enemy they had to deal with.

Vitachuco did not speak, and the exhausted men flung themselves down upon the soil, while two or three, less weary than their companions, took upon themselves the labor of replenishing the flames. Vitachuco sat silent, with his head upon his open palms, evidently in deep thought. More and more of the Indians entered the strange haunt, until over three thousand were gathered under the canopy of leaves. At last two powerful chiefs, with tossing plumes and warlike air, entered the place, and with them was Ozemba, the Princess, who at once approached and spoke to Vitachuco.

"The warriors have seen the signal, great cacique," she said. "Let the chief arise and tell them why they are called."

Vitachuco started to his feet, and his fierce eyes ranged over the assembled multitude. They were not of his tribe, with the exception of perhaps a hundred who had accompanied him from his country to this place, but they acknow-

ledged him as the greatest cacique of that country, and in a common cause were ready to obey his commands. A death-like stillness fell upon them as his majestic form towered aloft under the light of the great fire, and the circle of attentive faces convinced him that he had willing listeners. The common warriors were seated upon the turf, in a half-circle, and in front of these, in all the array of warlike gear, for which their nation is so noted, sat the principal war-chiefs, waiting for what he had to say.

"Caciques and warriors," he cried; "a danger greater than any of which our records tell threatens the many tribes. Three times have the white dogs come to these shores in their big canoes—three times have we sent them home with the loss of many scalps. The warriors have never been wanting in skill, in bravery, or in strength—but they need it all now.

"Caciques, you see before you the Princess Ozemba, who has come to us from the land where the Montezumas reigned before the feet of the white man ever trod their shores. She is not of our tribe, but we have loved her since the day when her father brought her, a little child, through many trials, until he found with us a refuge and a home. In Mexico he heard men tell of De Soto, and the deeds he had done among the Incas. Brave men fell like straw beneath his big sword, and hundreds have been trampled beneath the iron hoofs of his war-horse. My children, these horses are terrible. If you have but one arrow, let it fly at a horse rather than a man, for from them we have most to fear.

"These white men are clad in iron, which turns aside our arrows so that they fall to the earth broken. The horses are not so and the arrows kill them. The white man on foot is no better than a Seminole warrior. Good: we will kill the horses one by one, and then the weight of their iron arms will crush the men in the mud of the swamps. Have I not spoken well?"

A shout of approval went up from the wild array.

"My brothers are satisfied. We can not kill these white warriors upon the open plain, but the paths that lead into our country are hard to tread to men who have never seen them. We will make the paths bristle with arrow-points, and if their

feet are tender they can not tread upon them. Ozemba, speak, and the warriors will listen to your voice. I speak for war—war until the last white man shall cease from off the land.”

He sat down amid a general murmur of applause, and Ozemba advanced to the place he had just quitted, and faced the warriors. Her noble face, queenly form, and musical voice seemed to hold them enthralled—spell-bound.

“Children of the great tribe,” she said, in a clear, musical voice, “Cacique Vitachuco hath spoken, as he can speak, nobly and well. But there is one thing he has forgotten, and let me, weak as I am, whisper it in your ears. While the white men remain in your land there must be no enmity or wars among *Indians*. If you have been enemies, stretch forth your hands and clasp them together, and swear, while the white men are here, to forget that you are not brothers in blood, or that your hands have ever been lifted against each other. If you dig up the hatchet, let it never be against a man who has a red skin, while there are pale-faces to strike. Look at me! I am a woman, and the women of the tribes can not fight, say the medicine-men. Yet I will go among the warriors, and take my bow with me, and we will see who can wing the strongest shaft.

“It is true, as Vitachuco says, that I have come from a distant land to you. I was a princess, *more* than a princess, there. I was of the blood royal of a favored land, and my father’s brother upon the throne. White men came—men with steel arms—and fought against us, and we fell. Where the sun banner was once lifted now floats the detested flag upon yonder ships. I hated them then, as a child—I hate them now; and, since he could do nothing in his own land, now under the feet of the detested Spaniard, my father came, to give you aid as best he might, and brought me with him.

“De Soto has a great name, and he is a brave man. There are those with him who deserve better at our hands than a grave in the pathless swamps, but they have brought their own fate upon themselves. Let us fight them wherever we see them. Give them no rest. If one dares to straggle on the march, shoot him down as a lesson to all robbers. I

will speak no more, but when the time comes I know how to strike."

She stepped back to her place, and the warriors leaped up, brandishing their weapons and uttering the most unearthly cries, while the caciques did not move a limb, but sat in dignified silence until the tumult had ceased, and Hirrihigua, the most renowned cacique in that coast section, arose to speak.

This man, perhaps more than any other, had cause to hate the Spanish. De Narvaez, for some fancied wrong, while the cacique was friendly to him, had disfigured him by cutting off his nose, making his face the most horrible sight imaginable. The chief was yet in the prime of life, and that he had felt the indignity deeply there can be no doubt, yet he was the wisest in his speech of all the caciques.

"We cannot beat the white men," he said, slightly pausing, as many signs of disapproval were heard. "We can not beat them, for their coats are strong against our arrows. If we fight them in the open field, for every dead Spaniard a hundred Indians must lie on the field. If we hang upon their rear, still we must lose more than they. Let us rather go into our fortresses in the swamp, taking with us all the corn, and let the Spaniard march on his way. They came here for gold, but we have it not; they came for pearls—and they will find the best far to the north. If they seek to find us out in the swamps, can we not laugh at them and avoid them?"

"Does Hirrihigua remember who cut the nose from his face?" demanded Vitachuco, in a taunting voice.

"Hirrihigua remembers that," replied the cacique. "If the Spaniards had one heart and I could kill them with a single arrow, I would let it fly. But, the Spaniards have many hearts and many arms, and those arms are long. But, let not Vitachuco think because I counsel flight that I will not fight if all the rest are for war. Hirrihigua was never lost in the battle; even Vitachuco has felt the power of his arm. I say, the pathless swamp must be our refuge, and we shall do well, but woe to the Spaniard if he dares to follow us there."

Few of the wild array respected the wily cacique more

than Vitachuco, or acknowledged his wisdom to be greater; but the cacique was young and his blood hot; war was a pastime to him, and he doubted not the ability of the Indians to drive out the invaders, and by constant attack, to wear out their patience, killing them in detail, although not able to cope with them in a pitched battle. The opposition of Hirribigua at this juncture vexed him, and he bounded to his feet and began a tirade against the other, when Ozemba interposed.

"Let Vitachuco reflect a moment," she said, "and he will say that he is wrong. Hirribigua is a great and wise cacique, and we always listen to his words with pleasure, and it would grieve me very much that he and Vitachuco should cease to be friends."

Vitachuco was always easily swayed by the princess, whom he adored as a higher intelligence than his. He paused and made a graceful apology for his hot words, and the council went on. It ended as had been expected, by a determination to appeal to arms once more upon the first day of the Spanish march, and Hirribigua bowed gracefully to the decree. Having accomplished her purpose, the princess called the great cacique and Hirribigua aside.

"We have brave men among the warriors," she said, "and the night is dark. Come closer while I reveal a plan, for I would not have even the leaves hear my words lest the wind carry it to the ears of the Spaniards."

She rapidly whispered a plan, and the two caciques listened with evident admiration and delight. When she had finished, the face of Vitachuco lighted up with joy.

"It is good," he said; "Ozemba has the heart of a wise man, and if this is done the Spaniards can not go backward, and not one will escape."

Hirribigua shook his head, but still did not oppose the plan. Ozemba glided about among the warriors who had come with her from the country of Vitachuco, and selected from their number twenty men famous for their daring and skill. With these she made her way to the first bayou where a number of canoes were drawn up. Three of the largest were brought into requisition, and Ozemba took her place in one and prepared to push off. Vitachuco would have followed but she waved him back.

"No, great cacique!" she said; "if I perish in this attempt, one will be left to guide the Indians to victory."

"Stay, Ozemba!" he cried; "my heart is in your hand."

She waved her hand in silence, and the canoes shot out into the gloom, leading down the sluggish stream.

CHAPTER V.

THE DARING ACT.

THE fleet of De Soto lay at anchor in the waters of Tampa Bay. It was darkness all about them, the only lights in sight being those suspended from the rigging of the shipping. The soldiery were all on shore, and only the seamen remained to keep guard over the shipping, and they, oppressed by the drowsy stillness of the scene, were nearly all asleep. The cry "Guarda—alerta!" was heard from time to time from the decks to show that some, at least, did not sleep, but kept guard over the only means of escape from this strange land.

Garcia La Vega was on board the guard-ship, of which the Adelantado had left him in charge, for, since the sudden attack of that day, he had deemed it safer to be with his men in case of another attack. Garcia was on deck leaning against the small mast which rose from the high after deck of the flagship, looking dreamily toward shore. He was thinking of Ozemba—of the beautiful princess who had come upon the mission from the cacique. He thought of her in her young beauty as she stood defiant when his uncle would have broken through the restraints of the flag and punished what he regarded as insolence in the Indian interpreter who had been a slave.

Who was Ozemba?

It was plain that she was not of pure Indian blood, for her skin was as fair as his own. Yet she was among them, and held high power in the tribe. He fancied that her eyes dwelt kindly upon him when he refused to obey the orders of his uncle, but perhaps he might be wrong in that.

He could not understand what it might be, this strange feeling in his heart. He was not yet sufficiently careless of himself to allow that he, the son of a grandee of Spain, could love a simple forest flower like Ozemba, yet he was willing to say that no more beautiful woman graced the court of the united sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabel.

As he gazed, his eye was attracted by a spark which seemed to move aimlessly up and down the coast, at the distance of perhaps a mile. It was impossible for him—from the position he occupied, to say whether this light was on the shore or on the water.

Another followed, and another, until a cluster of these strange lights, shining like stars, were grouped together in one place, and then they disappeared altogether.

What could it mean? Were they "will-o'-the-wisps" which he had seen, or were they torches, borne in the hands of their enemies, the Indians? Knowing so well the treacherous nature of their savage foes, he watched closely for the reappearance of the lights, but he watched in vain. They did not appear, and Garcia decided that what he had seen was the luminous light which is often seen hanging over marshy places, and he no longer looked for it, but retained his position on the deck, still gazing toward the shore.

Half an hour passed, and he did not see the dark object which moved slowly up in the gloom and lay concealed under the high stern of the ship, so silently did it approach. The young soldier did not move, but stood in a reverie, until he was attracted by a slight rustling sound near the stern. Moving to that quarter without giving an alarm, he peered over, but could hear nothing except the low washing of the waves.

Yet he was not wholly satisfied that all was right with the ship. He knew that the cunning Indians would spare no pains to destroy them, and their acuteness was of no mean order.

He determined to watch, but without giving any alarm which might put the savage foe upon the alert before the time, if, indeed, they had any design against him. Dropping into the shadow, he waited for some moments, hearing nothing save the wash of the waves and the tramp of the guards upon the decks forward, and began to believe that he had been de-

ceived; so, rising with less caution, he opened the door of the cabin assigned to him, and entered, quietly. As he did so, he paused, for a slight, crackling noise assailed his ears, coming apparently from the main cabin, formerly occupied by the Adelantado and his suite.

There was a small window, covered only by a curtain instead of glass, which looked from the cabin in which he stood into the main saloon, and cautiously raising one corner, he peeped in, and to his surprise saw a single person holding a lighted taper, applying it to the silken hangings and tapestry of the cabin. In a moment more it would be wrapped in flames.

Garcia uttered a wild shout, drew his long sword and started out, but, as he reached the door of the cabin, he was met by the incendiary, who had snatched up a short pole-ax, which belonged to the Adelantado.

At a glance Garcia recognized Ozemba, who, spurred by the danger, struck him such a blow that, if he had not partially turned it aside, would have cloven his skull. As it was, the chain mail upon his shoulder parted in three or four of its links, and his sword dropped from his hand.

"Strike again, Ozemba!" he cried. "Ho, there! To me, sons of Spain! Santiago!"

Hearing the dread battle-cry of the Governor, which could always call them in the hour of danger, the armed guards rushed aft. But they came too late, for Ozemba, either fearing that she might not escape if she delayed, or from motives of pity, did not repeat the blow, but spinning lightly aside, avoided the clutch of Garcia's unwounded hand, and darted to the stern.

"Into the Governor's cabin," cried Garcia. "Bring buckets and dash water upon the flames, or the ship is lost."

Snatching up a trumpet, he darted to the hatchway and called all hands on deck. The cabin was soon filled by a crowd of active seamen, who tore down the silken hangings and tapestry, trampling out the flames beneath their feet. Others brought water and dashed it upon the smoldering heap, and in five minutes the flames were extinguished.

In the midst of the excitement no one had thought of looking for Ozemba, but, now that the flames were extinguished,

Garcia darted to the stern and saw her standing there, calmly regarding him.

"Back!" she cried, waving the ax up and down. "I would not have your blood upon my hands, for you are a brave man."

"Surrender, fair maid!" replied Garcia. "You shall have the honors and treatment which so brave a woman deserves."

"Surrender! Ha! ha! ha! You little know to whom you speak, Spaniard! The white man is not born who can take me prisoner, for I would sooner die by my own hand."

He rushed on to seize her, while she advanced a step, whirling the ax above her head, and seemed about to strike. He threw up his buckler, which he now held to ward off the stroke, when she altered the direction of the blow, and hurled the keen ax at an arquebusier behind him, who was aiming at her. The weapon turned twice in the air, and struck the man upon the casque, knocking him senseless to the deck. Then, laying one hand lightly upon the bulwark, she sprung boldly into the sea, while a dozen shafts whistled over the spot where she had stood.

As he heard the twang of the bowstrings, Garcia turned fiercely upon the men.

"Back, ye dogs!" he cried. "Comrades, would you aim your arrows at the unprotected breast of a woman?"

The men fell back, muttering to themselves, and he followed, menacing with his dagger.

"Do you murmur at me?" he cried. "Beware, or I shall give you a lesson not soon to be forgotten."

"Look at Pedro," replied one of the men, savagely. "He is weltering in his own blood, and shall we do nothing for vengeance?"

"Lower away the boats," cried Garcia. "I would not have her escape or perish in the waves, but the man who lays a hand on her in anger shall perish upon my blade."

The seamen sprung to obey his orders, and three boats were quickly in the water. Garcia sprung into the first, waving a lighted torch above his head, just in time to see a canoe vanish in the gloom, while a wild shout of defiance was heard, in which he recognized the clear tones of Ozemba!

"Bend to it, fellows!" hissed Garcia. "Death of my body—spring! Shall half a dozen Indians beat my best crew at their own work?"

The sailors obeyed willingly, and the boat sprung through the water; but, do all they could, the light canoe glided on like a cork upon the waves, keeping far in advance.

Still the sailors strained at the oars, and when they reached a place where the light of their torches showed the mouth of the bay, they saw three canoes dart into it, Ozemba standing high in the prow of the last, waving them a derisive farewell. At the same moment the arrows began to whistle about their ears, the Indians on shore aiming at the *torches*, and two of the half-armed stamen dropped bleeding into the bottom of their boat, while others were more or less injured.

"It will not do," said Garcia, as arrow after arrow struck and rebounded or glanced away from his mail coat. "Put back as quickly as ye may."

The sailors gladly laid out all their strength, and the boat rapidly receded from the dangerous position she occupied. When once in safety, they settled down to a long, steady sweep, which quickly brought them to the ship. Here Garcia ordered all the boats hoisted in save the one he occupied, and a new crew entered this. He passed rapidly from one ship to another, and found all in confusion, for in each an attempt similar to that of Ozemba had been made. It seemed that they had been waiting for her signal, a light shown from the stern windows of the guard-ship, and Garcia had come upon her suddenly and caused an alarm so suddenly, that she had only been able to give the signal which recalled the Indians from their work, by causing a flaming taper from the cabin window to fall into the sea. In some ships the Indians had gained a lodgment upon the decks, and in one the fire had already been started, but in every case the warriors had managed to make their escape in the confusion. The damage, however, was slight, and all acknowledged that only the discovery of the princess at her work had saved the fleet from destruction.

Garcia at once went on shore to make his report to De Soto. He found the troops under arms, for they had noted the confusion in the shipping, and feared that a land attack

was to follow, but it did not come. De Soto listened with grave attention while the young captain made his report.

"I can not see that you have been to blame in any thing, Garcia," he said. "On the contrary I must commend your vigilance, for had you not made this discovery, I fear that the fleet had been lost. But this princess, Ozemba, has a brave and daring spirit."

"She faced me as many a man might not have done with safety, and gave me a blow almost equal to the one I received this morning. Good faith, if this armor of mine receives many more such love-taps, I shall need a new coat of mail."

"She fought with my pole ax, say you?"

"Ay, Sir Governor, and handled it like a knight of the Temple. Save me from such blows, say I."

"Your armor is of proof, for the blade of that ax is of the finest Milan steel, tried and tempered. You pursued them, you tell me?"

"Until the arrows began to rattle about our pates, and I thought it folly to oppose unarmed seamen to their shafts."

"You did right, Garcia. Are you sure that all the fires are extinguished?"

"I have seen to that, Sir Governor. You shall have no trouble from that source."

At that moment Nuno Tobar advanced and saluted.

"Shall I order the men to lay aside their weapons, Sir Governor? The alarm appears to be at an end."

"Do so, Sir Nuno. I am pleased to see you so prompt in the duty assigned to you, though in a lowly station."

Nuno Tobar dropped upon his knee and bent his head.

"De Soto," he said—"I call you by that name because under that name Nuno Tobar first loved you—I have given my life into your hand. I have been accused wrongfully, but you believe me false, and I will not try to change your mood. Still, I pray you, if you ever loved me, to place me in the front of every battle, that I may prove with my best blood that I am still willing to die for you."

"Arise, Nuno," said De Soto, kindly. "I have stripped you of your honors and I can not give them back; but if, in other days, you prove that I have been deceived, Nuno Tobar shall see Hernando De Soto on his knees praying the

forgiveness of his friend. Go to your duty; but remember that it was a stern duty which compelled me to strip you as I did."

Nuno arose and went away slowly, with his hand before his eyes.

"Sir Governor," said Garcia, "as I am a knight and a soldier, I believe that you have wronged Nuno Tobar. He has sworn to me, on his honor as a Spanish gentleman, that he was falsely accused, and I, for one, believe his word."

"Has he sworn this upon his honor as a Spanish gentleman? Then, indeed, have I been deceived. I deemed it but justice to the count, from whom I received the Donna, to treat her with all honor; and when I heard of the insult offered by Don Nuno I was almost beside myself. I fear that I have been too hasty."

"More than this, Sir Governor, I myself am witness that they were lovers, tender and true, and that the false accusation of Herman Ponce, your former partner, only hastened their nuptials. I do not believe it possible that Don Nuno could be the villain he would be if the tale were true."

"I have doubted Ponce since he attempted to hide his treasure from me, and he will seek revenge for the ten thousand pistols he gave me in Havana after the discovery of his wealth. I fear that I have done Nuno a great wrong, but I can not repair it now. All the captains and leaders have their place, and it would be hard to deprive them of their rights now, on the eve of battle."

"Nuno asks for nothing except your love and faith," replied Garcia.

"That he has already," said the Adelantado, heartily. "You may tell him so from me."

Nuno Tobar was standing by himself when Garcia approached, pressed his hand, and whispered the Governor's message in his ear. A glow of delighted surprise passed over his face, and he cried, rapturously: "Now, indeed, I am worthy to die for such a man."

CHAPTER VI.

THE LOST GUARDSMAN'S RETURN.

SOME days passed in camp, and the Indians made no further attempt upon the Spaniards, knowing well that while they held their present position, now well fortified by the throwing up of earthworks, it would be impossible to attack them successfully. The Indian prisoner, who had been wounded in the first battle, was fully recovered, and De Soto ordered him brought into his presence, accompanied by the slave who had persuaded him to submit to the inspection of the leech. The savage was a stalwart fellow, in the pride of natural strength, and met the Governor as haughtily as a prince of the blood.

"My brother," said De Soto, "you have fought against us, and have learned that we are no children. Have you been kindly treated since you have been a prisoner among us?"

The interpreter translated, and the prisoner inclined his head slowly.

"The great cacique speaks good words in the ear of his Indian enemy. The white men have been kinder to me than I should be to white men if they came alive into my hands."

"We do not seek your blood," said De Soto. "See; my hand is open, and in it are many presents for the cacique, Hirihiagua, whom we respect. It is true that the white men who came before us treated him badly, and for that we are grieved. I will do all in my power to make it good."

The Indian answered by a derisive glance. He knew that the cacique hated the whites too much to receive their offers of friendship.

"Take the presents I give you, Indian, and return to your people," De Soto added. "We do not seek to wrong you, but to make you our friends."

The Indian laid his hand upon the shoulder of the interpreter.

"This man is also of our blood, and he is a slave to the great cacique. Why not let him go free?"

"Let it be so, since you ask it," said De Soto. "Give them presents, and let the word go out that these two pass freely."

The Indians stared at him in wonder; but he repeated his order, placed many gifts in their hands—gifts which among the simple Indians would make them rich—and told them to depart. But the interpreter paused upon the threshold of the tent.

"Great cacique," he said, "you send me back to my people, and my heart is full of happiness. I will tell you something. In the village of Mucuzco is a white man, who has lived with the Indians many seasons. He was one of that band of white men who so wronged Himihigua, and he would have burned the white man at a fire, but the daughter of the cacique saved him, and he fled to Mucuzco. He can speak the Indian tongue, and the cacique will give him to you, for he seeks not war."

"Ha!" cried De Soto. "This is news, indeed, and I thank you for it. Will you guide my horsemen to the place?"

"No, but I will point it out so that they can reach it."

The man gave him minute instructions regarding the course to be pursued, and he jotted them down upon a piece of paper. Having done this, the two Indians departed, the Spaniards making no effort to stop them, but on the contrary, opening the way civilly enough. They heard the word pass down to them—"Wacita and Incecan pass freely!" and knew that the great "cacique" meant to keep his word. They were hardly out of sight when De Soto sent for Garcia La Vega.

"Go to your troop, pick out sixty lances and march, taking your course by the route which is marked down upon the paper. At the village indicated you will find a friendly chief, Mucuzco, who has a white prisoner, taken from the hand of Narvaez. Bring this prisoner into camp."

"Shall my uncle go with me?"

"As you will."

"Have I liberty to include Nuno Tobar in the number?"

"Perhaps it would be better, as he will then see that I have forgiven him. Be careful to do no injury to the Indians unless you are first assaulted, for I would make as many friends as possible among the tribes."

Garcia saluted and retired, and half an hour later sixty horsemen, the pick and flower of the army, were on the march, cheered by their companions as they rode away. Cased in complete armor, with their spears in rest and axes swinging at the saddle-bow, their long swords girt upon their thighs, they made a gallant show. De Soto had chosen his army well, and not one of all of them, save perhaps half a dozen, but were under thirty years of age—men who had been trained to the use of arms from their youth up. At their head rode Basalisco, Garcia and Nuno, glittering in their arms and ready for any danger which might arise.

They dashed away at a slinging trot, following the line of the coast to clear the great swamps which lay before them if they turned inland. But for all this they were forced to cross a great morass, perhaps two miles in width, in which the horses sunk at times to the girths.

"By our lady," said Nuno Tobar. "If these Indians understood their business they might make us trouble at this spot."

He had hardly spoken when the Indian yell was heard resounding through the swamp and from every side their arrows were poured in, rattling upon the armor of the cavaliers like hailstones.

"Forward!" cried Garcia, shaking his lance. "Santiago!"

They dashed through the deep morass and reached a rising ground upon which the troop could form, containing, perhaps, three acres of dry ground. As they straggled up from the mire they formed in solid column and patiently awaited the rush of the savages, which they knew must come. The cries of preparation sounded from all hands, and they could see hundreds of half-naked warriors creeping through the underbrush, making ready for the assault. A moment more, and the battle-yell was heard, and darkening the very sky with their arrows, the Indians rushed to the battle. The horsemen received them upon their long lances, and cast them bleeding into the deep morass, from which they were dragged by their

companions and Lorne to the rear—for the Indian never leaves his deal upon the field of battle, if he can be saved.

All at once the Indians gave back a little, and a mailed figure bounded to the front. The cavaliers recognized at once the unknown knight who had fought so well in the first battle, and had nearly slain Pocahontas, the lieutenant-general. Turning upon the edge of the swamp island, the unknown called to the Indians to follow, and with wild cries a thousand men armed with war clubs, advanced to the attack, led by the steel armed warrior.

"White men," he cried, "you must yield to the Indians this day or die. Give up, I charge ye."

"Never!" cried Garcia, throwing up his visor. "Sixty Spanish gentlemen do not surrender so easily. Lay your spears in rest, my masters; form line—and together—charge!"

He closed his visor just in time to avoid an arrow, and at the command the horsemen swung out of the square in which they had formed, and rushed to the attack. They knew that there was little hope for them if the Indians once surrounded them, for at close quarters the war-club's would be better than their lances. The Unknown threw himself in the way to bar their onward course, and his savage friends rushed up to aid him, but what could resist that torrent of civilized gentlemen, to whom the pursuit of arms was a pastime? The Indians were cloven asunder as by a lightning bolt, and the armed Unknown bore away in the rush of his friends. In his race they saw him lift the ax to cleave down a flying Indian, and the savage only escaped with his life by leaping into the bushes. Garcia saw that the way was open before him, and not desiring to risk the safety of the enterprise by remaining longer in the swamp, he did not give the order to draw battle until they reached the more solid earth beyond, where they pulled up and drew breath.

"Hail!" cried La Vega. "That was a braver, good fellow. Hail up, warrior, for that charge, few of us but lived to tell the tale."

"I believe you, uncle," replied Garcia. "Number the troop and see what, if any, are missing."

The troop passed in review before the officers, and, to their utter surprise, not one was gone.

"Your pardon, capitano," said one of the troopers, "but there is *one* person missing."

"None that I can see, Alonzo Aviето," replied Tobar.

"But there is one, nevertheless. Your page, Pedro, who would come out with us in spite of all I could say. He said that he had orders from your lady to stay by you in every danger and that he *must* come."

Tobar turned pale as death.

"Where was he lost, Aviето? I would sooner suffer any danger myself than see the gallant boy come to harm."

"He dropped in the charge, capitano, and I would have turned to save him but that a wall of Indians were between me and the boy. He was dead, I think, for an arrow had gone through his doublet here."

He placed his hand on his breast as he spoke.

"There seems to be a great commotion among the Indians," cried Garcia. "Ha; look there."

Through the leaves which hung between them and the scene of the late strife they could see the crowd of Indians, and that a horse, which all recognized as that usually ridden by young Pedro, was standing in the midst of a great throng of the savages. A moment after the mailed form of the Unknown was seen in the saddle, stooping to receive something which the Indians lifted from the earth, and, even at that distance, they could see that it was Pedro, the page. His head dropped without motion upon the mailed arm of the Unknown, who pushed his way through the crowd, and disappeared in the morass beyond.

"Follow me, gentlemen!" cried Nuno Tobar, in a voice of agony. "Shall we stand idly by while that gallant boy is carried away to the torture?"

Half the troop would have followed him, but the clear voice of Garcia La Vega called them to a halt.

"What would you do, Captain Tobar?" he cried. "Suppose we follow yonder savage band, as you desire, and Pedro still lives, as there seems to be little hope—do you think they would not sooner plunge a knife into his heart than suffer us to take him again?"

"You may be right, Garcia," said Nuno, in a voice of agony; "but it seems hard that this noble boy should suffer,

and we, who are men, lift not a hand in his aid. I shall never be able to forgive myself if he comes to harm."

"We can do nothing, and for one I am willing to trust that so valiant a fighting-man as yonder one in the mailed coat will not suffer wrong to be done to a boy. Gentlemen, we must be upon our way. Threes about; forward, all!"

The troop swung round into column of threes and rode away. The country was now more open, and they knew well that the enemy dared not attack them except in cover of the woods. They were now rapidly approaching the village of *Manrico*, and Garcia stopped to consult the chart given him by the *Adelantado*.

"It is scarce two leagues to the village we seek if we are to believe this chart, which the Indian has given us," he said. "Caution now, and remember that the Indians of this village are said to be friendly, and have refused to join in the attack upon us. None of them must be injured."

"Faith, good captain," said one of the ensigns, "it is hard not to strike at the knees if they come in our way."

"Still must you do them no harm, gentlemen; such are the *Adelantado's* orders."

The men shrugged their shoulders and rode on behind their leaders in silence. Suddenly, from a wood in front, there emerged a body of savages some fifty in number, who rushed heavily down upon them, uttering wild cries. It seemed that an attack was about to be made, and in spite of the loud orders of Garcia, twenty troopers dashed away to meet the coming Indians, their lance-points glittering in the sun-rays, and their battle-cries sounding in the ears of the savages, who turned to flee for the woods, though one of their number remained, making wild gestures to the coming Spaniards.

He was a little, rather better young man, in Indian costume, a quiver at his back, a bow in his hand, and his arms and breast painted in fantastic characters. Thinking that he dashed toward Alvaro Avila charged at him, lance in rest, and instead of striking, struck his ground, parrying the thrusts of the lance with his bow, and crying out at the top of his voice:

"Seville! Seville!"

Avieto drew back his lance, and gazed at the seeming Indian in utter surprise.

"You cry Seville, and yet you are an Indian, as it seems to me. Stop; are you Juan Ortiz, the prisoner of Mucuzco?"

"I am he, indeed," replied Juan. "But call back your men, for those they pursue are friends to Spain."

Avieto caught him by the arm, extended his foot and Ortiz, just touching the boot, sprang upon the croup, and they hurried to meet the rest of the troop.

"Who have you there in charge, Avieto?" cried Garcia. "Good faith, a fine looking young savage."

"No savage, capitano," replied the prisoner, "but Juan Ortiz, a gentleman of Spain, though fallen very low."

"You are very welcome to us, Ortiz," said Garcia, eagerly. "This troop was sent out especially to find and bring you into camp. Are you willing to go with us?"

"Not only willing but eager to go, capitano," replied Ortiz. "I was on my way to the coast, with fifty warriors, when we fell in with you, and I forgot that I was dressed as an Indian, and I fear that some of my good friends will suffer for it if you do not call in your troopers."

Garcia caught up a trumpet, and sounded a recall, which brought in the troopers, who were hunting the poor Indians through every thicket with spear and sword.

Ortiz went out and called some of the fugitives, who came in reluctantly, fearing that they might be attacked. One Indian had been badly wounded, and his friends cast ferocious glances at Ortiz as the cause of this evil. It required much persuasion to convince them that the whites had only thought of them enemies from their mode of approach, and a messenger was dispatched to the cacique, telling him the truth, and asking him to visit the camp of De Soto. This done, the Indians who remained were loaded with presents and the troop turned about and rode swiftly away on their return, accompanied by Ortiz.

"They set upon you in the swamp, capitano," said Ortiz, as the troop approached the place where they had been attacked. "Follow me, and I will show you how to avoid this danger."

They passed rapidly around the edge of the swamp for the distance of a mile, and reached a place where a sort of cause-

way had been built to cross the swamp not more than half a mile in length. The Indians who had laid new snares for them at the old place of crossing, dashed wildly through the swamp to head them off, but when they reached the causeway, the troop had already crossed and were galloping away toward De Soto's camp.

"They have escaped us," said Hirribigua, addressing Vitachuco. "My brother, from this hour I will fight them in my way, and those who think themselves brave enough to oppose the white men may do so. I will go to my fortress in the swamp."

"I had forgotten that Hirribigua does not care to avenge the great wrong done him by Narvaez, and is willing to lie down like a beaten car while the white man tramples on his neck. It is good; I will away to my own country, and there I will find true hearts and willing hands ready to sustain me."

"Where is the white boy who was taken captive?" demanded Hirribigua.

"He is ours," replied Vitachuco. "In my own country the warriors delight in seeing the blood of the white man flow. He shall go to Vitachuco, and we will teach him how an Indian can revenge."

"Look," said Hirribigua. "You go to your own land to fight the white man in your way; I go to fight him in mine. When all is over, and the white chief has gone on his way, if both live you shall say whether my way is best or your own."

"If I die, I die striking for my country which I love. Go; I have no friendship with a dog."

Twice Hirribigua laid his hand upon a latchet, and seemed about to call upon his friends to avenge the insult. His disfigured face worked strangely, and his eyes flashed livid fires. But he restrained himself by a great effort, and calling his warriors about him, marched away, leaving Vitachuco with less than fifty men, standing upon the causeway.

"The dog has fled, my children," cried Vitachuco. "Come; we will find the princes and go to our own land, where every warrior is a great brave. And woe, woe, woe to the Spaniard who dares to set his foot upon that soil!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE INDIAN MOTHER.

THE Governor was surprised by the sudden return of Garcia La Vega, bringing with him the rescued prisoner, Juan Ortiz, for he had not expected to see them for some days. Ortiz was kindly received, and told his story. He had been lured ashore by a stratagem, and dragged captive to the chief village of Hirribigua, together with several of his comrades, who had perished by the most cruel refinement of savage torture, for the injury of the cacique was still fresh in his mind. Ortiz was saved by the interposition of the daughter of Hirribigua for a time, and put to the most menial labors, but after a time the savage cacique determined to put him to death. In this hour of peril, the beautiful girl counseled him to flee to the village of Mucuzco, to whom she was affianced, and to beg him for her sake to protect him.

Ortiz escaped and reached the village in safety, where he was kindly received by the young chief, who resisted every attempt on the part of Hirribigua to regain possession of the captive. Even the thought that he must lose forever his promised bride had no weight with the gallant young man, who could not in honor give up the prisoner. Ortiz had remained with him, treated as a friend and brother, from the time of his escape to the coming of De Soto, when he volunteered to intercede with the white men for the safety of his Indian friend and his people.

"You shall not intercede in vain," said De Soto. "The cacique shall be received with all honor, and not a hand shall be lifted to do him harm while De Soto lives. Tell him this when he comes into my camp."

The next day Mucuzco came, and De Soto was struck by his noble and ingenuous appearance. He believed that it was useless for his people to contend against the Spaniards, and had faith that they would do him no harm. He had been in the camp two days when the sound of a conch-

shell was heard, and a select band of warriors appeared, escorting an Indian woman of majestic appearance, past the middle age, who was warmly received by the young cacique. It was his mother, and she at once demanded an audience with the Governor.

"Good cacique," she said, "when Ortiz came to the village of my son, was he not kindly treated?"

"I have said so," replied De Soto, speaking through the medium of Ortiz. "Mucuzco has indeed behaved nobly, and has earned the esteem of the Spaniard."

"So said the other white cacique to Hirrihigua, when he enticed him to enter the camp, and when he was in their power, they made a great cacique no better than a dog. My son has only done good to the white men, and why should the white men wrong him?"

"The Governor does not intend to wrong him," said Ortiz. "They have kissed hands and are friends."

"Hirrihigua kissed the hands of Narvaez, and yet behold what was done to him. Tell the great cacique the words which I speak, Ortiz. My son is young and I am old. I nursed him in my bosom when he was a little child, and even an Indian mother can love her son. Now I am old, and it is fitting that an old mother should be willing to give her life for her son. I see that the Spaniard pretends that Mucuzco is not a prisoner, but I know that it is not so."

"But Mucuzco shall speak for himself," said the redeemed captive. "He shall tell you that he is not only a free man, but honored and loaded with gifts by the white men."

"But?" replied the old queen, "am I fool, that I can not see? If Mucuzco tries to go away they will shoot him with their fire arrows. Look—I am old, and ready to die for my son. If there is any punishment to be borne, I offer this old body to bear it, if Mucuzco can go free."

De Soto used his best endeavors to persuade the old queen that her son was in no danger; but she could not believe any good of the white men, whom she had been taught to hate. During the three days she remained in the camp, she retained her suspicion of treachery, and refused to eat any food or take any drink which had not been first tasted by Ortiz, in whom alone she trusted.

"You offered your life for your son," said Ortiz, "and yet you fear death for yourself."

"The old cling to life as well as the young," she replied. "But if, by the sacrifice of my own life, I can save my son, I am ready to die. But save him, for he has done you no wrong when you needed help."

"I will guard him as my brother," replied Ortiz. "Return to your village, since you fear to remain here, but remember that I am always true to your son."

She bade Mucuzco farewell, mournfully, evidently having little hope of seeing him again, and returned to the village. After eight days Mucuzco went back also, honored and rewarded by the Spaniards, and the old queen was more at ease, though she counseled her son never again to trust himself in the hands of the treacherous Spaniards.

In the mean time, scarcely a day passed when some partisan of Hirribigua was not captured and brought to the Spanish camp. De So'o, always willing to conciliate the cacique, took the same course in every case, loaded the savage with presents, and sent him back to the cacique with proffers of friendship.

The cacique refused all these proffers, although he appreciated the kindly spirit in which they were made. He still refused to come out of his stronghold, and all attempts to find him proved abortive.

On the day before the departure of Mucuzco a delegation came from the swamp cacique, headed by Asenio. Three beautiful Indian girls accompanied the delegation, one of whom wore a mask of dark lace, such as Garcia had seen employed in Mexico during his campaign with Cortez, when but a mere lad.

There was something in the attitude of this woman which reminded him of Ozemba, and he advanced and spoke to her in the language of the Indians of Mexico, with which he was familiar. The girl started and looked at him fixedly.

"You are Ozemba," he said; "deny it not, for my eyes can pierce a thicker veil than that which you wear. I can tell more, fair princess: you are *not* of the blood of these savage tribes, but of the purer blood of the **Montezumas of Mexico.**"

She uttered a short, fierce ejaculation, and her hand wandered to the hatchet in her belt.

"You can speak the Mexican language, fair princess," he continued. "Be not angry with me, for I would give much to gain your esteem."

"We are enemies!" she said. "Say that you speak truth—say that I am of the purer blood of Mexico—is not my nation trodden under the feet of the Spaniard? Where are the great monarchs who sat on the throne of Mexico; where the brave chiefs who led the army, and where the Eagle banner that was borne at the head? Your Cortez trampled upon the banner with iron hoofs, and trod out the life of the brave men who defended it. It is not the way to win my esteem to say that you were with Cortez in Mexico. Remember Gautemotzin!"

"Did you know Marianna, the wife of Cortez?"

"His *Indian* wife—the woman who gave herself to the arms of the slayer of her kin—of the best blood of Yucatan. The fierce conqueror who stretched out his mailed hand across the bloody corpse of her father, and claimed her. Speak not to me of Marianna, for I hate her memory."

"Yet Marianna was a noble woman, as pure of heart as the saints we worship. You wrong her by your speech."

"I am what you have named me—a princess of the house of the Montezumas. What has the friend of the conqueror, Cortez, to say to the outcast?"

"Speak more kindly to me," he said, softly. "I have struggled with myself, I have tried to cast your image from my heart, but I cannot. I love you, Ozemba—I love you."

She caught the vail and dashed it aside, and he saw that her face was working with a strange passion.

"You love me—you! Hat does the Spaniard think that Ozemba would be another Marianna?"

"No," he cried, eagerly, "on my soul be it, if I do not love you as a man loves the woman he would wear in his bosom through his life. I love you as a true man loves his wife."

"You forget who I am," she said, in a more softened tone, for she could see that he was in earnest. "Can a princess of Mexico, a woman of the oppressed race love a man who is

of the destroying nation? Go; you must not speak of this to me."

"You ask too much," he said, hoarsely. "For you I would give up all, name, rank, every thing because I love you too dearly for words to tell."

"Would you leave the Spaniards and fight against them for my sake?"

He looked at her with a fierce, questioning stare, his nostrils dilating, and his eyes flashing fire.

"Never!" he said, at last; "and if I did not believe that Ozemba would despise a man who could be so false to his faith, I could love you no more. Not even for *your* love will I turn my back upon my friends."

"Oh—Sun Father," whispered Ozemba, turning aside her head, "this man will make me love him! Guard me from him, Sun Father, guard me from the enemy who strikes through the heart!"

"You do not answer, Ozemba," said the young cavalier, softly, taking her hand. "Tell me truly, would you not despise me if I turned traitor to my friends, even for your sake?"

They were standing in the shadow of the trees, a little apart from the rest, and she looked up to see if they were observed. He led her more into the shadow, and again asked the question. She tried to draw her hand away, but he held it in a strong clasp.

"Nay, seek not to avoid me," he said, in a soft whisper. "When I said that I would give up name and fame, I meant that I would willingly return to Havana, leaving this noble adventure, if you would go with me as my wife. But, answer me the question I asked: Would you not despise me if I were a traitor?"

"Yes," she replied, boldly. "I should look upon you as a coward, unworthy the name of man."

"I thought so;" he cried, triumphantly. "I could not be so base, and yet retain your esteem. Tell me, sweet girl, may I not hope that you will hate me less as the days pass on?"

"I never thought to live until that time came when I would confess that there was one among the white men whom I did

not hate," she said, "but Ozemba cannot lie. I have tried to hate you as I hate all white men, because my country was trampled under foot, and yet in spite of all I can only think of you as a man of honor, who would not do a false act to save his life. Go; I will say no more."

"But speak to me, Ozemba," he cried, detaining her.

"No more of this now. While you dally here, the life of your chief is in danger. Know that the delegation comes not from Hirribigua, but from Vitachuco! Fly to the council-tent, and when Asenio gives the great cacique an orange, offer him half. But on no account let the cacique eat of it."

"What do you mean?"

"I will say no more. Fly, and see that he takes nothing from the hand of Asenio."

"I will see you again," cried Garcia, as he hurried away. "Let me pray you to remain."

As he hurried from the place, the fair princess fell upon her knees and lifted her hands toward the sun rolling through the blue expanse above her.

"San Father," she murmured. "If thy child has sinned, it is because you did not give her strength enough to strive against love, which is mighty and will prevail. Give me strength to keep my oath, and I will adore thee, God of my fathers; my own strength is weakness."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FATAL ORANGE.

While De Soto was gathering his officers for the council, the native delegation, consisting of ten warriors, remained in the camp, their eyes roving over the defenses of the Spaniards with keen, inquiring glances. De Soto, who knew the power of greatly showing in the eyes of a savage race, passed the word that every one should appear in complete armor, and should show off the power of their defenses in various ways.

Here and there cavaliers would be seen tilting, receiving the stroke of lance or battle-ax upon the buckler, and turning it aside with the ease and skill of long practice. At another place, a party of cross-bowmen had set up a mark and were practicing at it with their fatal bolts.

In another part of the field, the arquebusers were engaged in ball-practice—the crack of their weapons awaking echoes in the surrounding forests.

“Waga!” said Asenio, speaking in a low tone to one of his companions. “When the great cacique is gone, we can beat the others. Why does he leave us here to see this child’s play? I am anxious to begin the work.”

“We are come to do a great work,” replied the man addressed. “Where is Ozemba? Her hand should be in this.”

“She speaks foolish words in the ear of Vitachuco, and would have him spare De Soto. Ozemba is not what she was, and does not hate the white men as she should. I have borne their chains, and I know their tender mercies.”

At this moment Numa Tobar and Juan Ortiz came out and called them to the council. Ortiz was now in complete armor, a present from De Soto, and looked like a gallant cavalier, as he was.

“Ha!” said Asenio; “Juan Ortiz looks braver now than when he carried wood in the village of Hirribigua.”

“The world is full of changes, good Asenio,” replied Juan, who overheard him. “Then it was the cacique’s turn—now it is mine. The Governor calls you to the council.”

The Indian signed to him to lead the way, and followed in silence into the tent, where De Soto and his principal officers sat awaiting.

“Let my brothers be seated,” commanded De Soto. “They are very welcome to my tent.”

The delegation, seated upon the earth, waited for some time in silence. The eye of Asenio roved over the group in the tent, and his eyes sparkled with delight as he saw that De Soto was not in armor, and his hand stole under his blanket in a quick, stealthy way.

“Why have my brothers come?” said De Soto.

“Hirribigua sends us to speak in the ear of the Great Ca-

sique. The heart of the cacique is not proud, but he can not love the white men. De Soto is not like other Spaniards; he has been kind to those who love him; but Hirribigua says, let the white man go away, for the cacique will not speak to him."

As he spoke he drew from the bosom of his hunting shirt a sharp knife, and at the same time took an orange from the hand of one of his friends, who had been holding it carefully.

"This I give you from the hand of the cacique—the fruit of the earth—and he prays you to eat of it, and as you eat, remember him who sent it."

De Soto took the orange in his hand, which had been divided by one stroke of the sharp knife which the Indian held in his hand. De Soto was about to raise it to his lips, knowing how great a value is set upon such trifles by the Indians, when Garcia came in hurriedly, turning deadly pale as he saw the orange in the hand of the Governor, and starting forward he whispered in his ear.

The Governor gave a low murmur of surprise, and turned to Asenio.

"My brother has brought me a present from the hand of Hirribigua," he said, quietly. "The cacique is not here to eat with me, but you can take his place, and I will think that I am eating the feast of friendship with the great cacique himself."

As he spoke he gave one half the orange to the Indian, who waved it back.

"No," he said. "What an Indian gives he gives, and I will not take it back. I will eat another orange with the great cacique."

But De Soto insisted.

"My brother must eat with me of the gift of Hirribigua, or De Soto will think that it is not given in a good spirit. Take the portion which I offer you, or De Soto will not eat."

The copper color of the chief's skin turned to an ashy white as he took the divided fruit in his hand. He had determined to sacrifice himself for the good of the nation. Great beads of sweat stood out upon his forehead as he raised

the fruit to his lips and was about to eat, when Garcia dashed the orange to the earth.

"This determined villain would destroy himself if he can only take you with him, De Soto. The orange is steeped in a deadly venom, a single taste of which is death."

"Betrayed!" hissed Asenio, starting to his feet. "This, then, for revenge!"

Before a hand could be raised to stay him he sprang upon De Soto, and struck full at his breast with the knife which he still held. De Soto never moved in his seat, and the keen knife was shivered to the hilt against a vest of chain mail which was concealed beneath the doublet. At the same moment half a dozen men-at-arms appeared with their cross-bows ready, standing just behind the officers.

"Back, you treacherous dogs!" cried Juan Ortiz. "You are not the men to take the life of De Soto."

"It is over," said Asenio, dropping his hand. "We have failed, and dare not go back to the village of Vitachuco. For know, great cacique, it was not Hirribigua who sent the orange to you, but Vitachuco, a greater far than he. Brothers, I will show you how to die."

He snatched from the folds of his blanket another knife, and before they could seize him, the point had touched his heart, and he fell dead at the very feet of De Soto. His companions started to their feet, and with a determination which won the admiration of their enemies, even while it filled them with horror, each drew a concealed knife and stabbed himself to the heart, falling lifeless beside the man who had given so strange an example.

"Shall we ever conquer such a people as this?" said De Soto, sadly. "Bring in the women that they may see that Asenio and his men lie dead by their own hands and not by ours."

Ozamba, followed by her two companions, entered the tent, and her eyes took in at a glance the terrible truth. She did not start or tremble, but her cheeks flushed and her eyes dilated strangely.

"You will tell the cacique, Vitachuco, who sent you here, that these men died by their own act after they had failed to take my life," said De Soto. "For, as I am a Christian, not

a hair of any man's head should have been harmed after they had failed to do their work."

"I will tell Vitachuco the truth," replied Ozemba, in a sorrowful voice. "Asenio was too quick; he should have lived to strike many blows against the invaders. Know that he who lies here was the dearly loved brother of Vitachuco, and that he will never rest until he has revenge for his brother's blood."

"He deserved his fate," said Juan Ortiz, quickly.

"Why should you speak, Ortiz?" she cried, turning upon him, severely. "You who were saved by the weak heart of Muenzo, who has taken the hand of the destroyer and laid it upon his heart. Great cacique, if I call men to carry these bodies away shall they come and go freely?"

"I give you my honor that they shall not suffer wrong."

She went out of the tent to the edge of the woods and lifting the conch-shell which hung at her girdle, blew a clear call. Ten minutes after an Indian appeared at the edge of the woods and came forward. They conferred for a few moments, and then he left her, and shortly after nearly a hundred Indians, bearing litters of green boughs, appeared in the open space and followed her boldly into the intrenched camp of the Spaniards. They looked neither to the right hand nor the left, their stern faces unmoved, and only the glint of their dark eyes showing that they felt the blow which had fallen. The litters were set down before the great tent of De Soto, and a dozen of the savages entered and began to carry out the bodies, one by one. De Soto and the rest looked on sullenly, for they felt that from this hour there could be no unity between them and the braves of Vitachuco, through whose country they must pass.

Ozemba remained in the tent, directing the movements of her men until the last body was removed, and each laid upon a separate litter. Five men ranged themselves upon each side of every litter, and waited for her orders, but she came back to speak a parting word to De Soto.

"From this hour until the last Indian of Vitachuco's race is gone, there must be war between us, great cacique. I pray you to think, before you devote a whole nation to destruction, what you will gain by striving with us. There are other

lands more rich than ours, but none where the people are braver or more willing to die for cacique and country. Leave us to the simple life, which alone we covet, and take your white-winged ships and go away."

"You ask that which I can not grant, beautiful princess," said De Soto. "Some day, perhaps, you will know us better."

"We know enough already, as they know in Mexico and in the land of the Incas. We seek to know nothing more. Send some horsemen under this young warrior," singling out Garcia La Vega, "to guard us on our way, lest your braves fall upon us as we march."

Garcia, obeying the command delivered by a nod of De Soto's head, called out ten of the bravest troopers, who led out their horses and marched just behind the Indians, bearing away their dead. As they marched, the whole party broke into a low, mournful, wailing chant, which sounded with strange solemnity through the deep aisles of the forest. After a march of about three miles they reached a river, upon the banks of which many canoes were lying.

Ozemba saw that every body was carefully laid in the canoes, and then signed to the Indians to proceed, leaving one canoe for her use.

"Order your men to fall back," she said, in a low voice. "I would speak with you."

At the command of Garcia the men fell back into the forest out of sight. The warriors took their places in the canoe and waited for the princess.

"You can not go away, Ozemba," said Garcia, mournfully, "without giving me a word of hope."

"You have made me speak," she said, sadly, "and I have said that which one of my blood should never have spoken to the invaders of the soil. See; but for me De Soto would have eaten of the poisoned fruit; for you I forgot the danger to the country of my choice."

"You do not regret it?" he said, eagerly. "I know that you do not; it is impossible."

"Perhaps you are right," she answered, in the same sad tone. "I could not bear that so brave a man should die in torment by a cruel death, who was born to die in the shock

of battle. Enough of that; he was saved, and Asenio has paid the penalty. Let us speak of ourselves."

"Ay; you must not leave me to return to the savage life you lead. Vitachuco may be a noble Indian, but is not of your blood, and the haughty Mexican race should never mix with that of the savages of Florida."

"Many white men I have seen who were not worthy to sit by the side of the cacique, Vitachuco. I have given him to understand that one day I will be his wife."

"But you do not love him! Listen to me, dear one. In my own native land, in a happy valley of Andalusia, my mother waits for me in her castle. She loves me dearly, and will love the wife I bring with me. Let us go, and in that happy land forget that war has ever been."

She shook her head.

"I am not of your faith," she rejoined, "and it is not right that we should mate. Besides, I have given my word to Vitachuco that I would return to him, and I will keep my promise, for I never broke it to mortal man."

"But you will not marry him?" he pleaded. "I know that you love me—seek to disguise it as you may; and as for me, I tell you. Keep your word with Vitachuco, but mine shall be the aim to wrest you from him."

"I have another vow to keep," she said, "and that vow shall not be broken. When the nation of Vitachuco is in the dust, when there is no hope for him, in that hour I will listen to your pleadings, but not until then."

"Enough," he said, with sparkling eyes. "Woe to Vitachuco if he dares to bar our way, for he shall go down."

"You will not conquer him with loud words," she said. "There is one thing more which I would ask, and you must promise, or never see my face again. You have seen the warrior who fights in the steel coat of the Spaniards?"

"I have both seen him and felt the weight of his ax, and I am eager for the time when we shall meet again."

"But you must not meet," she cried, eagerly. "If you ever hope to win my love, promise me, on your faith as a warrior, and by the God whom you adore, never again to strive with him in battle."

"I grant your request," he said, gayly, "though I had set

my heart upon the meeting. A most valiant fighter he is, and I would that we were friends."

"He is engaged in the same cause as I, and has no better reason to love the Spaniards, but he would not do you a wrong. The sign of your faith is on your sword-hilt. Swear upon it that you will not fight with him."

"Except to save the life of a friend."

"On *no* account," she cried, stamping her small foot angrily upon the sod. "Swear!"

"I swear," he said, raising his sword-hilt to his lips, "by this holy sign, and on my faith as a Spanish soldier!"

"It is enough," she said. "You will keep your word, and I am more at ease."

"One thing before you go, Ozemba. I would speak of the boy who was taken by the unknown warrior in the swamp. Does he still live?"

"He does."

"Have you any influence with the man whose prisoner he is?"

"I have."

"Then let me beg you, as you are a woman, to see to it that the poor lad has no wrong done him. He came across the sea for the love of my friend, and is too weak to do you any injury. Will you do what you can to help him?"

"He shall not be wronged. I will take it upon myself to promise that. And now farewell, for we have talked too long, and the men look suspicious. Woe to me if Vitcheco should also suspect, for I should not have long to live. No; do not touch my hand, but think of me sometimes when I am far away."

She glided away from him like a spirit, and sprang into the canoe, which shot out into the stream, and Garcia rode slowly and thoughtfully back to his men.

CHAPTER IX.

VITACHUCO AT HOME.

UPON a broad savanna, near a beautiful lake, was the village of Vitachuco. It was fashioned in a way long since abandoned by the Indians, who have sadly degenerated since the days of which we write. It contained perhaps five hundred houses built of wood and constructed with considerable mechanical skill. In the center was a plaza, such as is seen among the Pueblos of New Mexico, surrounded by the houses of the principal men. Upon the northern side of the square was the dwelling of Vitachuco—a large structure, capable of accommodating a considerable number of persons. The plaza itself was alive with moving forms, some twenty days after the attempt of Asenio upon the life of the Governor. Numerous Indian warriors, with tossing plumes and gay dresses, armed for battle, were moving to and fro among the women, who were here in great numbers, dressed gayly, and appearing in the best of spirits, for it was a festival day among them. What cared they for the coming of De Soto and his men? They had confidence in Vitachuco, and believed that he could exterminate the white race if they dared to set foot upon his soil.

Vitachuco passed through the crowd of warriors and females, who made way for him respectfully, and entered his house. It was fitted up with rude appliances for household comfort, the best their simple means could afford, and far beyond anything in use among the Indians of the present day. The walls were hung with the heads of the bear, deer, and other denizens of the forest which had fallen under the arm of Vitachuco. The house was of one story, divided into many rooms by partitions of oak, rudely hewn into shape by the Indian ax. Passing through the first room, Vitachuco entered one in which sat Ozemba watching over the slumbers of Petra, the page, who, pale and wan, was reposing upon a couch of skins, spread upon a heap of wild-duck feathers.

"The prisoner sleeps," said the cacique. "Were all his friends like him, so many of the braves of the Southern tribes would not now be lying with the dead. The people clamor for a victim, Ozemba; shall not this one be given to the torture?"

"Hush!" said Ozemba, raising her hand. "The prisoner sleeps for the first time in many nights. Come with me, Vitachuco, I would tell you a secret."

Vitachuco stepped aside, and the princess whispered a brief sentence in his ear. He started and looked at her fixedly, and then, stepping quickly but lightly to the side of the couch, bent his knee and looked intently into the face of the sleeper. Then, rising, he signed to Ozemba to follow him into the next room.

"Am I right when I say that this prisoner is not to die, Vitachuco?"

"Ozemba is always right," said the cacique. "Vitachuco does not war against the weak but the strong. Let the white prisoner rest until strength comes back to the weak frame. But why do the Spaniards lead such into battle?"

"They did not know of it, my cacique."

"Then why was it done?"

"Is not love strong, cacique of Vitachuco?" demanded the princess. "Love has done all this and made the weak strong."

The cacique slowly inclined his haughty head, as recognizing the truth of the saying.

"Love is mighty," he said, slowly. "Has not Vitachuco loved long, and is not his love the guiding star of his life?"

Ozemba blushed vividly, and turned away her head in shame. She knew that the cacique had loved her long, and that he had great reason to hope that one day she would share his power. How could she refuse him, then—how tell him that her heart was given to one of the hated race, against whom they were both sworn to war?

"Let us not speak of this now, Vitachuco," she said, softly. "There are other things to deal with than idle dreams, if you would stop the bold invader who approaches your boundaries. We have heard his trumpet in Acuera and Apalachee, and

know that he is strong and brave, and that it will need all the power of Vitachuco to drive him back."

"Yet it shall be done," exclaimed the cacique, proudly. "In Aconera and Apaachee he has had trouble enough. Many a headless trunk was hung upon the trees as a warning to all white invaders. So we will wear them out, kill them, man by man, until not one white dog remains."

"It may be so," said Ozemba, "but I fear that we can not hope to beat them in battle. What noise is that which I hear?"

"I will go and see," said the cacique, stepping toward the entrance to the house. As he threw it open, a large number of plumed warriors seemed to be added to those already in the plaza, and two haughty-looking caciques, bearing a marked family resemblance to Vitachuco, were seen advancing toward the entrance. He greeted them with extended hands.

"The sons of my mother are welcome to Vitachuco," he said, kindly. "Enter, and find rest."

They followed him, without reply, into the room where Ozemba was awaiting them, and she came forward and gave them a cordial greeting.

Both were brothers of Vitachuco, and dearly loved by him, so much so, that, on the death of his father, he had divided between them one half of his dominion. Ozemba was well known to them, and their stern faces lighted up as she received them.

"We have come to take counsel with our elder brother," said Ochile, the elder of the two visitors. "The white man comes, and we would know how to receive him. We have talked with him, and know that he is valiant, a child of the sun and a virtuous man."

"How should you receive him save with hatchet and arrow?" replied their brother. "Have you forgotten so soon that Aconera tried to destroy the men who had kept him a slave so long? Can it be that the brothers of Vitachuco come to counsel peace with the invader?"

"I speak but what I hear," said Ochile, "and I have heard much of these white men. They are children of the sun and moon, the gods we worship, for they come from a land where the sun rises. They have with them fierce brutes, which they

call horses, more terrible than the great white bear of the north, so swift that the Indians can not fly from them, or have force to resist them."

The answer of Vitachuco is worthy of a place in history; Rolla's speech to the Peruvians was not more eloquent. He rose like a tower, and his strong arm was stretched out toward his brothers in a strangely impressive gesture.

"It is evident enough, my brothers," he cried, "that you are young, and have neither experience nor judgment, or you would not speak in praise of these hated white men! You extol them as virtuous men who injure no one. You say that they are valiant—that they are children of the sun. The chains which they would hang upon you, and the friendly spirit which you have acquired, have caused you to speak like women, lauding those you should censure and abhor.

"You remember not that these strangers are no better than those who formerly committed so many cruelties in our country. Are they not of the same nation, and subject to the same laws? Do not their manner of life and actions prove them to be the children of the spirit of evil, and not of the sun and moon, our gods? Go they not from land to land, plundering and destroying, taking the wives and daughters of others, instead of bringing with them their own?

"Go back to your people, and stand like strong towers between them and your land, and if ye fall, it is in a holy cause, and the sun-god will reward you. Warn them not to enter my dominion, for I own that, valiant as they may be, if they dare put foot upon my soil, they shall never leave it alive, for the last man will I exterminate!"

The brothers, who had been more than half inclined to yield to the invincible Spaniards, cowered before his glowing words, and an hour later, accompanied by five hundred of the bravest warriors of Vitachuco, set out on their return. In the midst of them, mounted upon the horse of Pedro, and accompanied by Vitachuco on foot rode Ozenda, who had a bold and lofty look upon her face. The old fairy was upon her, and she dreamed of the extermination of the men who had trod her native land beneath their iron hoofs.

De Soto had not been idle. All except two small ships had been sent back to Havana, and leaving a trusty band, in

charge of an able leader, to guard the camp in Tampa Bay, with drums beating and colors flying, he had marched out toward the village of Mucuzco. That friendly cacique had furnished him with guides to the next village, and they marched away, beset on every hand from the moment they left the territory of the friendly cacique LeLind. Woe to the man who dared to straggle from the line of march, for a dozen hands were tearing at his throat before he became aware of his danger.

Through the countries of Acuera and Apalachee their course was marked in blood, and every cover bristled with arrows, until at last they reached a stream which barred their onward way, and a bridge must be built. The work was begun by a Florentine engineer, who accompanied the army. Planks fastened together by strong ropes were laid upon the water, and a party of the footmen, throwing off their armor, dashed into the stream and drew them to the other side, where they were fastened to trees upon the bank. This had scarcely been done when the unarmed men who had crossed the stream were assailed by flights of arrows from the cover of the thick woods and driven back into the water, but Garcia La Vega, at the head of twenty horsemen, dashed across the rocking bridge and put them to flight. The army crossed in safety and marched on, the people flying at their approach, all moving toward a certain point.

"They are concentrating for a great battle, Sir Governor," said Garcia. "We shall have trouble before long."

"Let it come if it must," cried De Soto. "We must be ready to meet it as becomes Spanish gentlemen. Let our motto be ever 'forward,' and our trust in God, and the might of the northern shall not prevail against us."

For two miles their march was uninterrupted, save by occasional shots from the covers, aimed for the most part at the horses. At last they reached a great morass nearly a mile in extent, and to reach this they must force their way. Not one among the soldiery but knew that they were about to fight a terrible battle, although not an enemy was in sight, and they knew also that the horses could avail them nothing in the swamp struggle.

"We must fight this battle out on foot," cried De Soto

turning to Garcia. "Bid my squire give me my sword and buckler."

"No, no!" cried Garcia. "You must not peril your life in such a battle. Give me a hundred men, and we will force a passage through yonder marsh or die in the attempt."

"I must have a part in the fray, Garcia," said De Soto, frowning. "Would you make a child of me?"

"Then remain here with the horsemen, and if you see us in peril or likely to be beaten back, let us hear your war-cry and all will be well."

"Agreed; choose your men."

At the command of Garcia the sixty lances who had followed him in quest of Juan Ortiz sprung from their saddles, took their swords and bucklers, and prepared to follow. Forty pikemen and as many cross-bows were detached from the force of foot soldiers, while Tobar, armed with sword and buckler, took his place at their head, and they rushed into the swamp together.

Scarcely had they gone a hundred yards when they were assailed from all sides, and the swamp seemed alive with the active forms of the savage foe. Myriads of feathered plumes danced in the sun-rays, and their ears were deafened by the savage war-cry. Foot to foot, hand to hand, waist deep in mud and water in many places, they fought, the Indians, armed only with bows and clubs, dealing blows which seemed impossible, under which the blood spouted from beneath the armor of the Spaniards. Still they struggled on, forcing back the infuriated red-men, step by step, until they reached a narrow pass between two shallow swamp lakes, a path through which they must go if they would reach the open country beyond. And barring their way, greeting them with hideous yells and tramping snouts, stood fifteen hundred warriors, ready for the fray.

"Twenty cross-bowmen advance and sweep the pass with your bolts!" cried Nuno Tobar.

At the word, the cross-bowmen rushed forward, and kneeling under cover of the bushes, began to pour a steady fire into the close ranks of the savages. The twang of the bow-string, the battle cry of Spain, and the yells of savage vengeance mingled strangely in the depths of that solemn forest. Gar-

cia, standing half-covered by his shield, turned aside the arrows directed at his person, standing up like a tower of strength, and awakening the admiration even of his enemies by his noble bearing.

The Indians began to scatter from the front, and the pikemen advanced, searching every bush with their steel points. The savages rushed upon them and bore them back, contesting, inch by inch, the soil, until the mail-clad swordsmen rushed to the front, and then a battle royal commenced, the Indians retiring until the small force of Spaniards had passed some distance between the two ponds.

Then, as if by magic, numberless canoes darted out of the ferns and reeds, and paddling within short arrow-range, began a terrible fire from both sides. At the same moment, those in front turned like tigers on their prey, and the terrible cry of *Vitachuco* was heard above the din of the battle, as, struggling to the front, he opposed himself to Garcia.

"Dog of a white man!" he cried, "*Vitachuco* comes—*Vitachuco*, the great cacique of the everglades."

The warrior cacique carried upon his left arm a sort of buckler of tough leather, and in his right hand a ponderous war-club, which none but he could wield with one hand. Careless of danger, or fearless of the known prowess of the Spaniards, he rushed at once to the attack and bore the young leader backward in the first onset, aiming a blow at him which, though partially turned aside by the buckler, caused Garcia to reel backward. As he staggered, he made a thrust at the Englishman, who received it upon his target, and struck again.

But Garcia was now upon his guard, and the blow glanced harmlessly aside from the buckler, while a cut across the forehead warned the cacique not to be too rash. The rush of the Indians, at this moment, somewhat embarrassed the movements of the chief, and three men forced themselves to the front, ready to second him in the fray. Foremost among them, bearing the ax which had before made such work among the Spanish cavalry, came the unknown knight, who opposed himself to Nuno Tobar.

"I think you a traitor, Sir Masker," cried Nuno, as he struck a blow full at the casque of the Unknown. "Parry, if ye will."

The stranger bounded lightly to one side, and evaded the blow, even while the ax was circling around his head. Nuno interposed his buckler and turned away the blow, but it was followed by a thrust from the pointed spear upon the end, which took him by surprise, and passed the rivets upon his shoulder plate.

The two brothers of Vitacheco were doing their work manfully, while the Spaniards in the rear were thrown into confusion by the galling fire from the canoes.

"Fight on, gentlemen!" cried Garcia, as he leveled a blow at the head of the cacique. "Remember that De Soto's eyes are on you!"

"Our men are confused by the arrows from the lakes," said Nuno, who was next in the ranks, still opposed to the unknown knight. "Good blow, Sir Master. This is for requital."

He thrust furiously, as he spoke, and the next moment his sword was shivered in his grasp by a blow from the battle-ax of his enemy, and he stood unmanned before him. Covering himself by aid of his buckler, Nuno reached back for a sword, and one was thrust into his hand by a man in the second rank. But, while doing this, the battle-ax was playing sad havoc with his buckler, which was split in two places by the heavy blows.

"We must retreat unless we have help," cried Nuno. "These men fight like devils, and my opponent is worthy of a knight of the old days."

"We must *not* retreat!" cried Garcia. "Not sound trumpets and charge! Level your pikes, my brave men, and forward! Cross bows, to your work! We will die where we stand, but we *can not* retreat."

The arm of Vitacheco now hung useless at his side, and but for the target he bore he must have fallen. A dozen Indians rushed forward and threw themselves between Garcia and the cacique who was forced away by orders of his men, crying out furiously against leaving the field of battle.

The rest still struggled, and a barricade of dead and wounded men was stretched across the narrow neck of land upon which they fought. The Unknown, surrounded by the Spaniards, made a bloody business for his assailants, but his

single strength would have been of no avail had not his followers, careless of self, flung themselves upon the swords and pikes of the Spaniards, forcing them back with their naked hands, and the Unknown was safe. No sooner was this done than the Indians broke away from the front with mournful cries, and the bloody field was won!

CHAPTER X.

WAS SHE A TRAITOR?

THE Spaniards had but little cause to exult over their victory. The arrows of the Indians, directed from the numerous canoes, had not failed to do bloody work among the half-armed pikemen and cross-bowmen, and six had been slain outright while three times that number had received severe wounds, some of which afterward proved mortal. A blow which Nuno Tobar had received from the battle-ax of the Unknown had splintered the mail upon his left arm and driven pieces of the steel into his flesh, inflicting a painful hurt. Garcia, though unwounded, was literally worn out by the constant strain upon his muscles, which had been kept up throughout the terrible affray, and others of the leaders were more or less injured.

But the Indians, who had flung themselves with such reckless bravery upon the pikes and swords of their adversaries, had suffered most severely. Hundreds of these gallant men were scattered through the swamp, and lay dead upon the narrow neck of land on which the chief struggle had taken place. De Soto, advancing to the side of Garcia, as he stood leaning breathless upon his sword, felt a pang of remorse as he noted the fearful loss of life.

"This is dreadful, Garcia," he said. "Even the Peruvians, and they were right gallant men, never fought as did these brave but misguided heathen. I would have peace with them, and they demand the sword."

"Vitachuco led them on," said Garcia, "and he is a man

who will not yield. If his men had not thrown themselves between us, a hundred deep, his life would be at an end, for I had marked him for my vengeance."

"But the mailed Unknown!" cried De Soto, admiringly. "Pizarro and Cortez, brave as they were, would have needed all their skill to struggle with him. I have fought in many a battle, but never yet did I see a knight who handled an ax half so well."

"He must be a renegado," said Garcia, "else he could not know the use of arms so well."

"An Englishman, perhaps. These English fight well, as the Spanish know to their cost—lightly as they regard the people of England. But we waste time. Here, Basalisco, order out men to search the swamp and pick out all the wounded men to be found. I fear that we have suffered greatly."

The old warrior started on the mission, and in half an hour the dead and wounded were laid upon the sod, the wounded under the care of the surgeon. A great trench was then dug in which they laid the bodies of the slain with military ceremonies, and the troops then marched out and made a camp two miles beyond. Garcia had charge of the guard, and in going his rounds was attracted by a light which blazed up for a moment from a bush as he passed, and then went out. It blazed again, lighting up a space of ground for thirty yards around, and he saw, in the midst of the lighted space, the figure of Ozma! Was the signal made for him? He listened for a moment, and heard a snarl like of an old Mexican love-ditty, as he had heard it when he fought under the banner of Cortez, as his page, fifteen years before:

"Come hither, my own love,
I await thee, my true one;
In the shade of the deep grove,
When the battle is done."

Garcia was not the man to resist such a challenge. Throwing a cautious glance to the right and left, to see that he was not observed by the guards, he glided away in the direction of the sound, which receded as he followed, until he came upon her, in a deep sheltered nook, under the branches of the oak.

"I heard your challenge, sweet princess," he murmured, as he took her hand, "and you see that I am here."

"I felt that I must see you," she said, suffering him to retain her hand. "It is unmaidenly, perhaps, but I have nothing to fear from you. Is it not so?"

"Garcia La Vega never wronged a confiding woman in all his time, and you may trust me to the death."

"I do—I do trust you, Garcia," she said. "When I see you and hear your voice, I feel no longer the hate which I should have for the men who have robbed me of a country and a home. Why is it that I can not hate them? Can it be that I, who have seen my noble grandfather die under the orders of Cortez, must love you still? It seems to me that the sun should strike me dead."

"Love will go where it is sent, my princess," said Garcia, softly. "From the moment when I saw you sitting in state under the canopy of the great war canoe, and heard your sweet voice, I loved you. When you speak, the words seem to set themselves to music, and I forget that war has ever been or will be. Let us love each other as we may while life is in its bloom."

"Be it so, then, Garcia," she said, giving him both hands. "See! I give myself to you forever. I will love you all your life long, and follow you on your long journey over the land and sea, but not yet. I have a vow to perform and I will keep it truly. Are you sure you love me; will you not regret your promise to the daughter of Montezuma when your proud relatives scoff at her Indian blood?"

"Never!" cried Garcia. "Whom I love my mother will love as well, and, secure of that, I ask for nothing more."

"Then let us part now. You are in danger here, so far from your guards, and if Vitachuco should suspect I can not tell what he might do in his blind passion. I—Hush! Back to your camp and quickly, or you are lost."

Garcia turned, but hesitated, fearful that he left her in danger; but she urged him to go, and, snatching a kiss from her red lips, he darted back toward the camp. Scarcely had he gone a hundred paces when a dozen Indians threw themselves upon him from the thicket and dragged him to the ground. Hampered as he was by their weight, he could only

struggle vainly, and in his extremity he shouted aloud to his men:

"To *me*, guards! Help for Garcia La Vega!"

The next moment his head was muffled in the folds of a blanket, and lifting him in their arms, the Indians ran quickly into the depths of the forest, carrying their prisoner with them. The rattle of arms and the exultant yells of the savage warriors in their rear told that they were resisting the efforts of the Spaniards to follow in pursuit; and, at last, even these sounds died away in the distance. Then the Indians paused and laid their burden down, some of them clinging to his hands and feet, as if they feared that he might escape them yet. The blanket was thrown off, and as he lay upon his face, his arms were drawn back and secured behind him by strong thongs at the elbow and wrist. Similar ligatures were placed upon his ankles, but tied in such a way that, while he could take a short step, any attempt to run would hurl him to the ground.

"It is well done, princess," said one of his captors, who was the younger brother of Vitachuco. "The captive is yours; do with him as you will."

As he spoke, three Indians came forward with torches; the prisoner was assisted to arise, and he found himself face to face with Ozemba. But where was the look of love which he had seen upon her face in the clear moonlight? She looked at him scornfully, her dark eyes full of deadly hate.

"So, then, friend of Cortez" she said, "you are my prisoner, to do with as I will. Away with him, sons of the everglades! To the camp of Vitachuco."

"Ozemba," cried Garcia, despairingly. "Can it be that *you* have betrayed me?"

He spoke in the Mexican tongue, which was but imperfectly known by the Florida Indians, but her face never lost its look of scorn as she replied:

"I have been asleep, and dreamed that I loved one of the hated race. Now that I am awake, I am ashamed of my dream, and will try to make atonement for it."

"If I believed it possible that you could betray me, Ozemba," he said, in the same tone, "I should pray for death. But, it is impossible; you have said that you loved me, I have

hold your hand in mine; my lips have touched yours, and though I must die, let me lose my life in the belief that you were true to your love."

Ozemba turned her head away and stamped her foot impatiently upon the sod.

"Do you not hear how he insults me?" she cried, in the Seminole language. "Away with him quickly, before I forget myself and strike him dead."

The Indians seized and led him away, Ozemba and the rest following closely, but refusing to hold any intercourse with him. Garcia was in agony, for he loved this strange woman beyond expression, and the idea that *she* had entrapped him, that she had led him into this danger through hate of the Spanish race, was simply maddening. Once, when he turned his head to address her, the brother of Vitachuco struck him in the face with his open palm, and the indignant blood mounted into his cheek as he strained at his bonds with desperate strength. Woe to the savage if he had been able to free his hands but for a moment.

"I will remember that blow, Indian," he said, fiercely. "Woe to you if we ever come face to face in a battle."

The Indian laughed derisively, for he knew how little chance remained for Garcia to see his friends again. They moved on, across a rude causeway, and reached a sequestered spot in the swamp where the defeated Indians had made a camp. Here they found Vitachuco, cowering under his worn blanket and furious against the Spaniards. He started to his feet with a cry of joy as Garcia was led bound into the camp, for he recognized the young warrior with whom he had fought so long.

"The Sun Spirit has at last turned his face to Vitachuco," he said. "White man, you have come to give us our revenge for the wrongs you have this day done us."

"It is as God wills," replied Garcia, speaking the Mexican language. "If my time has come to die, I am willing to go."

Ozemba had taught this language to the cacique, who bent his head gravely.

"Good; have I not said that the white man knows how to die? But the Indians do not always make the death of an

enemy a couch of roses. We have tortures many and terrible, and the white man will pray for his death before it comes."

"That is a coward's work," cried Garcia. "Let me have my sword, and set me in the midst of your village, and I will make my death glorious. Or choose any ten among your warriors, yourself included, and I will fight them all."

"Stop!" said Vitachuco, laying his finger upon the arm of Garcia. "My brother has a brave heart, but he is cased in steel, and the coats of the Indians are thin. Will my brother strip off this steel coat and fight with Vitachuco?"

"Gladly!" replied Garcia. "I did not think so much honor dwelt in the bosom of a savage."

"Let it be so, then," said Vitachuco. "My arm is not strong, for the blows of my brother are not those of an infant, but I will fight him."

"Or, if you like this better," cried Garcia, raising his voice, "let the mail-clad warrior who fights in your ranks meet me on the field, and if I conquer I go free; if not, you have me in your hands to work your will."

"The mailed warrior is not here," said Vitachuco, "and I can not speak for him."

"I can!" cried Ozemba, advancing. "I will answer for that warrior that he will fight this Spaniard, and give him blow for blow until one can strike no more. It is better so, for Vitachuco is not strong."

"I must fight this battle in my own person," persisted Vitachuco.

"But I tell you, no! The white warrior will have a free-man worthy of his blade, and if your warrior falls, Vitachuco is still left to his people. But fear not. The Ute was never born to be slain by this man's hand."

"I should prefer to fight with him," said Garcia. "You can not hold me to my promise not to fight him, Ozemba, for you have betrayed me to my enemies, and I am coming to die. But I shall die with sword in hand, as becomes a Spanish gentleman."

"Take the prisoner in charge, and guard him well," said Ozemba to her men. "He is mine until this battle is over."

CHAPTER XI.

A STRANGE DUEL.

GARCIA lay down in his armor under the grand old trees, and for a time watched the movements in the Indian camp, a novel sight to him. After a time the fatigues of the day overcame him, and he sunk into an uneasy slumber, which quickly changed to perfect rest. The strange sights and sounds of the swamp camp—the position of peril—all were lost to him, and he awoke refreshed, to find Vitachuco standing near him.

"Has my brother rested well?" he said, kindly. "Is his heart strong?"

"I am ready for any thing," said Garcia, sitting up. "I wish that you would take these cords from my limbs, for I shall not try to run away."

The cacique took a knife from his girdle and cut the thongs from the hands and feet of the captive, and Garcia stood up and stretched out his arms, to bring back the circulation.

"That is better," he said. "Now when is this battle to begin?"

"We will not make you fight a battle fasting," said the cacique, waving his hand.

Some women appeared, bearing smoking venison and maize cakes upon a wooden tray, which they set down upon a log near Vitachuco, who invited his prisoner to sit down and eat with him.

Not wishing to show any distrust of the Indian, Garcia sat down at once and ate heartily, the cacique pressing him to eat until satisfied, when a woman came up and removed the dish.

Garcia now arose and looked over his armor, piece by piece, until he was satisfied that it was in good condition. When he had done so, the cacique brought out a pole-ax of such beauty that Garcia uttered a low cry of delight. The handle

was of polished ebony, with grooves to fit the gauntlet, and the blade was of the choicest Milan steel.

"I know that ax!" he cried. "Cortez wielded it upon the causeway of Mexico, and gave it to Guatemozin afterward."

"It is true," replied the cacique. "The Unknown is brave, and would not have an unequal battle with any man, and he offers you this ax, as he fights with no other weapon. You can use the sword, if you choose it."

"I am not to be outdone in courtesy," replied the young Spaniard. "The ax is not the weapon I should choose, but as I am the challenger, the choice of weapons shall rest with my adversary. When shall we have the battle?"

"When you will."

"Let it be at once. I am eager to end the affray as soon as possible."

The cacique took up a shell trumpet and sounded, and the Indians started up at once and began to clear a circle for the fight. Garcia stepped boldly into the open space, bearing his ax and target, and waited. Five minutes later, a passage was made through the circle of red warriors, and the mailed Unknown bounded lightly into the ring.

Now that they stood face to face Garcia had an opportunity to note the symmetrical shape, the consummate grace and panther-like activity of his adversary. He was armed from crest to heel in Spanish mail of the "chain" pattern, which was fitted with exquisite nicety to his agile frame. Upon one arm he carried one of those round bucklers, then in use, and in his right hand the ax which had done such deadly work among the legions of De Soto. His face was covered by a visor with a barred mandible, and, taken altogether, he was the picture of a warrior. Garcia sank his ax low in a courteous salute, and the Unknown did the same.

"Are you ready?" demanded the Spaniard, slightly raising his ax.

The Unknown inclined his head in silence.

"To your guard, then!" cried Garcia. "God defend the right!"

As he spoke, he swung the keen ax about his head, advanced his foot and struck. The Unknown received the blow upon his buckler, and rewarded it by another, delivered with

such skill and force that Garcia staggered under it. The Indians uttered low cries of approbation at the result of the first encounter; but they cried out too soon, for Garcia recovered himself with ease, and struck in return. For five minutes they were foot to foot, dealing blows with all their skill and force. The armor, so bright a moment before, became dented and stained. The bucklers were hacked and hewed in a hundred places, and when both staggered back from the first encounter, literally out of breath, a universal shout of approbation broke from the Indian band, who could appreciate bravery even in a foe. By mutual consent the two leaned upon their axes and eyed each other steadily.

"By my word, Sir Warrior," cried Garcia. "I, who have stood upon many a bloody field, never fought with such an adversary. It will be no shame if I fall by your hand, and to overcome you would be the brightest flower in my crown. Whoever wins shall win much glory."

The Unknown made an impatient gesture, and the fight was renewed. The ground whereon they fought was thickly strewn with bits of mail, chips hewn from the bucklers, and feathered plumes which had waved from the casques. Both fought as they had never fought before, and yet neither gained the mastery, although many terrible strokes were given. The Indians were silent now, for they felt that an unlucky blow might at any moment decide the combat, and, although they had confidence in their champion, they knew that he was opposed to a skilled warrior, quite his match in the art of arms. Again they staggered back and drew breath quickly through their heaving lungs, and Garcia felt a thrill of admiration at the warlike skill of his adversary.

"Let us part as we are," he said. "Neither of us has any right to defeat the other, and only chance can do it. Shall I go free, and end the battle here?"

"Ha!" cried Vnamero, "does the white man fear? Strip off his armor, then, and give him to the flames!"

"Back!" cried Garcia, waving his ax. "You shall see whether I fear or not when this battle is at an end. Brave warrior, use all your skill now, for this close ends the battle for either you or I."

The first blow which Garcia dealt smote away half the

buckler of the Unknown, and descended upon his shoulder. He reeled and seemed about to fall, and Garcia, rushing forward to complete his work, received the spear-head upon the ax full in the breast, bearing him back three paces before he could strike his blow. To his surprise the Unknown flung away his shattered buckler, and, grasping his ax with both hands, attacked him with an impetuosity and a reserve of muscular force which the Spaniard had not looked for. The fierce blow, descending, passed completely through the buckler, so far that the ax was locked in the broken shield, and, struggle as he would, the unknown knight could not withdraw it. Garcia had his enemy at his mercy, and his hand went back over his shoulder in the attitude of striking. But, even while a groan of agony passed through the Indian ranks, the Spaniard perceived that his opponent could not extricate the ax, and his arm sank gracefully from the position and rested upon the earth.

"I strike no blow at an unarmed man," he said, throwing off his buckler—"least of all one who knows how to fight so bravely. Take up your ax."

But the Unknown bent his head for a moment, and then, advancing to the side of Vitachaco, spoke to him in a low voice at the same time pointing at the stately figure of Garcia La Vega.

"The Spaniard has won his life," he said, his voice sounding strangely sweet, even in the hearing of his enemy. "I was at his mercy and he would not strike. Shall he not go free?"

The cacique hesitated for a moment. The battle had resulted in a different manner than what he had hoped for, but he was not the man to dishonor his promise.

"Let it be as you say," he said, at last. "The Spaniard is conqueror, and has richly earned the life which we give. Speak to him, and tell him to come here."

The Unknown beckoned to Garcia, and he approached slowly. Now that his blood was cooled, he realized the force of the struggle in which he had been engaged, and his muscles began to grow weak.

"You have conquered, white man," said Vitachaco, "and you shall see that a cacique of the Everglades knows how to

keep his word. While you have done us great wrong, you are worthy to take a place among those noble warriors who know not fear. I should be glad to fight with you were you not weakened by this great battle, but I will not ask it now. **Some day we will fight."**

"Agreed!" said Garcia. "I could not have a more noble adversary. Am I free to go, then?"

"You are free," replied Vitachuco, "and twenty of my warriors shall conduct you to a place where you can easily meet your friends."

"One thing I would ask at your hands," said Garcia. "I wish to speak to the princess, who made me prisoner, and thank her for what she has done."

"The princess Ozemba is not for you to speak with," said the Unknown, haughtily. "Go your way, and leave her to her own life."

"Perhaps you claim her?" cried Garcia, fiercely, laying his hand upon a dagger, and advancing a step.

"These Spaniards come of fighting blood," said the Unknown, bitterly. "Yes, I claim the princess Ozemba, and have a better right to claim her than you or any other man who treads the green earth."

"You shall answer for it one day," replied Garcia, setting his teeth hard. "Know that, although the princess betrayed me, I will not give up the love which she has implanted in my heart. I will keep her memory green while life lasts, and die—"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the Unknown. "This is a Spanish lover, who forgets that but for Ozemba he would be in his own camp. There—we waste words, and Vitachuco is getting impatient."

"But let me tell you first, young sir, that I do not forget nor forgive all that you have said. When we fight again, our strife will be mortal."

"Stop!" said Vitachuco, stepping between them, and speaking in a thick, guttural tone. "Has the white man dared to love Ozemba, the Warrior Princess? Let him speak, for the heart of the cacique is very full."

"And if I had," replied Garcia, defiantly; "what is that to you?"

"Enough, and more than enough," said Vitachuco. "Ozemba is the promised wife of Vitachuco, and he has long waited for the time to come when he could take her into his house to make the fire bright and help him to rule his people. Shall a white dog come between Vitachuco and the star of his desire? Have you dared to love Ozemba?"

"Yes!" replied Garcia, boldly. "I love her as I never loved another woman in my time. Here, in your camp, with all your men about you, I will not deny the truth. Now do your worst, but I will make a bloody reckoning with you before I fall."

He darted back, snatched up his buckler and pulled out the ax, which was in it still, and turned defiantly. The Indians caught up their weapons and were about to rush upon him, when they were recalled by the voice of Vitachuco.

"Hold your hands, I say! Back, men of Vitachuco, or you make your chief no better than a white dog and a common liar. I have said that this man goes free, and my word is good. I can not speak with a double tongue."

Garcia dropped the ax and buckler and came forward unarmed.

"I ask your pardon for doubting you, great cacique," he said. "I should have known that Vitachuco can not lie, and that his word, once spoken, is law. My life is in your hands, for I will not again take up the ax."

"Vitachuco has still something to say," continued the cacique, glancing quickly about him to see that the Unknown was not near, and making certain that he had disappeared. "I will never rest, when once you are in your camp, until my foot is planted upon your breast and my knife in your heart, because you have dared to love Ozemba, the Warrior Princess, who is to be my wife."

"She shall not, cacique; by Heaven, it shall not be."

"Ha! Shall not?"

"No!"

"Who will prevent it?"

"I, Garcia La Vega, will do it. And if you wed her—if, keeping her to her promise, you make her your wife, I will kill you wherever I find you, as I would a dog. Now am I at liberty to go?"

The cacique called out twenty men and sent them, with Garcia in charge, by a path known to them, to intercept the march of De Soto, who was already on his way. An hour later they saw the banners dancing in the sun, caught the glitter of spears through the trees, and heard the tread of coming men.

"Away with you!" said Garcia. "You have done your work, and no harm shall befall you."

The Indians understood his gestures if not his words, and darted out of the line of march of the Spaniards, still half a mile distant. Garcia stood in a musing attitude, leaning against a tree, when he heard a light step, and Ozemba stood before him.

"You have come, then," he said, "after my own arm has redeemed me from captivity? As I have a hope of mercy, I felt more deeply the thought that you had betrayed me than the ax of the Unknown."

Ozemba fell upon her knees before him, and lifted her hands entreatingly. Her face was deadly pale, and she seemed about to faint from weakness, and could not speak.

"Rise!" he said, taking her hands. "I can not bear to see you on your knees to me—you, of all others. I love you so well that I can forget even the great wrong which you have done me."

"Garcia is blinded by anger, and can not see that what I have done was forced upon me," she said, mournfully. "I dared not aid you openly while the brothers of Vitachuco looked on."

"Then you did not betray me?" he cried, eagerly, raising her in his arms. "I knew it—I felt it. What a blind dolt I have been, to doubt you for a moment."

"They came upon us so suddenly that I knew that you could not escape from the toils, but hoped to set you free in some other way. Never doubt me again, my hero; Ozemba can not bear reproach."

"I will never again wrong you, even in thought," he answered, pressing his lips to hers. "But, tell me—this unknown warrior with whom I fought said that he had a better claim to you than I. Tell me what he meant."

"I can not tell you now, my hero. We must not waste

words, for I must join Vitachuco upon the march, or he may suspect me. When we reach our country, I will try to prevail upon the cacique to meet De Soto in council, and perhaps they may be friends."

"Why should you leave me?" said Garcia. "There is danger in a return to the Indian cacique."

"Yet I must face it, or the young white prisoner is lost. Have you forgotten that your friend loves him and would set him free?"

"I had indeed forgotten Pedro," replied Garcia. "Is it in your power to save him?"

"Yes; let me whisper a secret, but you must not yet reveal it."

Garcia stooped and listened to her whispered words. He started and looked at her wildly, and she laughed lightly.

"Such is the power of love, my Garcia. Now do you say that I must not go back?"

"No," replied Garcia; "in justice to my friend I must part with you, but I pray you to be careful."

The column of De Soto was now rapidly approaching, and Garcia recognized his own troop, with his uncle at their head.

Straining the princess to his mailed breast, he kissed her lips, and brow, and suffered her to escape; then sprung out into the road directly in the path of the advancing troop, who greeted him with wild huzzar.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PAGE'S SECRET.

For some days after the battle, the troops of De Soto remained in the village of Ochile, which they entered soon after the arrival of Garcia La Vega from his brief imprisonment. It was somewhat smaller than the village of Vitachuco, but contained four hundred houses. That of the cacique Ochile, in which De Soto made his head-quarters, was built in the

shape of a great pavilion, with eight doors, and room enough within to accommodate the entire suite of the General. The inhabitants had fled to the swamps, and for the time they remained in the village the Spaniards feasted upon the various meats, flesh and fowl, which had been left behind by the Indians in their hasty flight. No further attempt was made to oppose the Spaniards' advance, for the Indians had lost heavily in the attack in the swamp, and Vitachuco had drawn off the remnant of the men he had taken with him to Ochile, and returned to his own country, to await the coming of his enemy.

At the end of a week Ochile returned to his village, and submitted to the great white man, and even volunteered to send an embassy to his brother. It was sent back with a scornful reply and many threats against the white men, and at last Ochile consented to accompany the white army on the march, and endeavor to secure an interview with his brother. With drums beating and colors flying, the army at last entered the great village of Vitachuco, and went into quarters, De Soto as before taking possession of the palace of the cacique. The Indians had concealed themselves in the swamp; although they only waited the orders of Vitachuco to fling their naked breasts upon the lances of the Spaniards whom they hated with tenfold ardor since he had entered their village.

At last the brothers obtained an interview with the cacique, who asked them how long the Spaniard desired to stay in his country. De Soto replied that he would depart at any time, and declared that he only sought the friendship of Vitachuco. The cacique at last agreed to meet De Soto in the village and arrange the terms of a truce, much to the surprise of the Adelantado, who had not hoped to conciliate this savage warrior. A day was appointed for the meeting, and when the hour arrived, the Spaniards were drawn up in order of battle in the principal approach to the village, awaiting the coming of the cacique. As the hour came, the sound of rude drums and shell trumpets could be heard in the distance, and coming from the forest they saw a glittering force of savage warriors, nearly a thousand in number, their gay blankets, bright feathers and painted guises giving them a gay and warlike appearance. At the head marched Vitachuco, bear-

ing in his hand a white flag, and upon either hand strode his two brothers, armed and painted like Vitachuco. Yet the chief far surpassed them in manly grace and strength, and a murmur of admiration passed through the camp. At the distance of twenty yards the Indians halted, and Vitachuco, accompanied only by his brothers and Ozamba, came boldly forward. At the command of De Soto the Spaniards saluted the cacique, and then grounded arms, while the Governor, accompanied by Garcia, his uncle, and Nuno Tolar, advanced to meet the cacique.

Vitachuco took the extended hand of the Governor, and pressed it to his breast as a token of amity, and then greeted the other officers kindly, but with a dignity which was all his own. Garcia he only regarded with a look of scorn.

"Great cacique," he said, "I know not your language, and Ortiz shall speak for me since he knows the words I speak. You say that you are children of the sun and come to us in peace. It is good; we worship the sun, and are proud to meet with his children, and if we have fought with you it is because we did not know how wicked we were. Let us now be friends, and Vitachuco will welcome you to the country he rules."

The Governor answered this speech in the same spirit; presents were exchanged, and the forces mingled amicably. As the peace was concluded the Indians returned to the village, until several thousand were scattered about the place which the Spaniards had found so lately a few weeks before. To Garcia alone the cacique refused a friendly greeting, and Garcia returned his proud glance with a look of equal scorn.

"How is this, Garcia?" said De Soto; "you at least ought to be friendly with the cacique."

"We covet the same prize," said Garcia, with a side look at Ozamba, who was standing by the side of the cacique.

"You do not wish to share the fate of Nuno Tolar?" said the Governor. "Your princess is a noble woman, and shall have no wrong."

"Not while I live," replied Garcia. "Do you know that she is the daughter of the last Montezuma, and a princess of the Aztec race?"

"Ha!" said De Soto. "Then, by the life of Cortez, I have heard of her father standing upon the bridge at Mexico, and urging on the warriors to the assault. He was the brother of Guatemozin."

"I love her," said Garcia, "and one day she shall be my wife."

"Then beware of Vitachuco, for I can see that he looks upon you with no kindness. But is he not a noble warrior?"

"There is not a man in the camp who would have any chance with him in a struggle, hand-to-hand, without weapons," replied Garcia. "Excuse me; I must speak with the princess."

He approached her and would have spoken but that Vitachuco stepped between.

"Stand back, white man; the daughters of our race must not speak with the white men."

"Back, yourself!" replied Garcia, angrily. "I would speak with the princess."

"Ozemba has nothing to say to a white man," said Vitachuco. "If she has, let her speak."

"No," replied Ozemba, with a meaning glance at Garcia; "I have no words to speak with the young white warrior."

Garcia would have been angry but for the look she gave him, which he understood.

"Has the white man his answer now?" said Vitachuco, laughingly. "The princess can speak for herself."

Garcia bowed and stepped aside, and Vitachuco entered the house after the Governor, looking back to see that Ozemba followed. As she passed in she whispered in the ear of Garcia:

"The sun shines on the east wall!"

She entered the house and went at once to her own apartment. It had a small window on the eastern side, closed only by a sort of lattice over which a curtain was dropped. This lattice she pushed open without lifting the curtain, and saw Garcia standing near. As the small white hand was thrust out, beckoning him, he approached and leaned against the wall, close to the lattice.

"Seem to watch the people in the plaza," she said "and

do not look toward the window. A hundred eyes are watching you, and if you are seen to speak with me it means death to our love."

"I hear you, my dear one," said Garcia. "Trust me to be cautious."

"I must speak with you for you are in danger, and I can not bear to see you die. Trust not Vitachuco, for he has seen that he can not beat your General in open battle, and hopes to do so by treachery."

"Treachery?"

"Yes; warn your General to be on the watch, and not to trust himself unarmed in the presence of Vitachuco. He would hold his own life as nothing if by its loss he could sacrifice De Soto."

"Thanks, Ozemba; you are indeed our good angel. Let us now speak of something else—of the love we bear each other."

"Is this a time for such foolishness? You need all your skill and address to guard you from Vitachuco. Come to this window to-night, when the village is at rest, and I will tell you more. But first, invite your friend to the feasting-hall, and I will bring him his page, who is now well."

Garcia hurried away to find Nuno, and brought him into the place designated, where he was kindly greeted by Ozemba, in the Mexican language, which she had learned from Garcia.

"Your page has been kindly treated while in the village," said Ozemba "and I love him dearly."

"I do not like that," whispered Garcia. "What, love a page? By my faith, he is a pretty boy, but—"

"And he loves me," said Ozemba, with a gay laugh. "Wait; I will bring him to you."

She opened a door, and called, in a clear voice "Come!" A light step was heard, the flutter of garments, and a beautiful girl, whose short, curling black hair contrasted strangely with the pallor of her face, threw herself upon the breast of Nuno Tobar.

"Isabel!" he cried, straining her to his heart. "You were?"

"This is your page," said Ozemba, "the wife of your heart

whom you left in the city where the wife of the great cacique reigns."

"I could not bear to part with you, dear Nuno," murmured the Dona, as she clung to her husband. "So I stained my face, cut my hair, dressed myself as a page, and wrote the letter which said that I was a cousin of Isabel de Tobar. Can you forgive me?"

"But to meet this danger—to march by night and day through bands of hostile savages, and to join in deadly battle, merely to be near me! It is too horrible."

"Am I not safe, Nuno?" she said. "You must thank this dear girl, who saved me from the wrath of the Indians, and by revealing my sex, from a horrible death by fire. Ozemba has a noble heart."

"Hush!" said the princess, shaking her head. "I have done nothing but my duty. Garcia, let us leave them, and Isabel shall tell her husband what has happened since she came into the village. Go away by yourself. We must not be seen together."

Garcia went into the audience-chamber, where he found the three caciques and the Governor, with others, holding a council by aid of Juan Ortiz. The face of Vitachuco was firmly set, and although his lips might proclaim friendship, Garcia was sure that he had some deadly purpose in his heart. Stopping over the Governor, as he half-reclined upon a couch of skins, he whispered in his ear the secret of the page.

De Soto looked at him wildly:

"Isabel here, in the Indian village? Woman's faith and trust are stronger than fate itself. But she shall go to Espiritu Santo; she shall not stay here."

"It is better for her to go back," said Garcia, as he sat down near the Governor, listening to what was going on. Vitachuco, with a great appearance of humility, proposed to give a grand display of his forces on the next day, to show the Governor how great a number of allies he had at his command, although he promised that the Indians should come unarmed.

De Soto promised to attend the review, which was to come off next day. Vitachuco and his warriors then left the village, but, to the surprise of Garcia, Ozemba was allowed to

remain for an hour after the departure of the caciques and their troops.

"I must go," she said. "I must know their plans, for it is plain that Vitachuco no longer trusts me."

"Then remain with us, and trust to the valor of De Soto and his men to baffle any plan of the enemy."

"No, I must go. And after nightfall, watch the high hill to the west. If a fire is kindled there, it means danger, and you must come to the review armed and ready for battle."

She went away, and Garcia remained upon the watch. At midnight he saw a spark upon the distant hill, which grew larger and larger, until it burst into a blaze, and Garcia knew that treachery was intended, and De Soto was warned.

At the appointed hour, Vitachuco came with twelve of his bravest warriors. De Soto had his men drawn up, with their arms ready, and the horsemen on the flanks, and marched out in order of battle. The Indian review was to take place on a great plain, having a dense forest upon one hand, and two lakes upon the other, one of which was hardly three miles in circumference, but of great depth.

The position was a strong one, and here nearly ten thousand warriors were drawn up in battle array, apparently without weapons of any kind. But De Soto knew that the foot of every warrior was planted on his bow, concealed in the long grass.

Vitachuco had planned to seize the Governor and drag him away, and then suddenly throw his force upon the Spaniards in their camp. Without warning, they might have succeeded, but De Soto was on his guard.

"The princess is not with you," said Garcia, who was with the Governor, addressing the cacique.

"You have seen her for the last time," replied a voice in his ear, and turning, he saw that the Unknown had joined the party, wearing the same armor in which he had fought the duel in the swamp.

"You and I will settle this affair, one day," lifted Garcia. "What are you to Ozemba, strange being?"

"That is my affair," replied the Unknown, mockingly. "I have no time to waste with you. Yonder are the men of Vitachuco. Is it not a gallant force?"

"They look bravely," said Garcia; "but if they offer any treachery, we will spoil their feathers."

The Unknown laughed scornfully, and suffered his eye to run carelessly over the Indian force. As he did so, Vitachuco lifted his hand to give the signal for the seizure of De Soto, when a Spanish trumpet gave a warning blast, and eight of De Soto's guard threw themselves upon the cacique, and pinioned him before he could lift a hand.

Garcia threw himself in the way of the Unknown, but, with a sleight for which La Vega had not looked, the warrior threw him heavily, and flung himself into the ranks of the Indians, who, rushing forward to the rescue of their cacique, were met by the lances of De Soto's horsemen, led by Nuno Tobar and Basalisco. Vain was the interposition of the feeble bucklers of the savages to repel the charge; the troop broke through them, formed again, and charged from the rear.

De Soto was now in the saddle, fighting with the headlong valor which always distinguished him, and in an incredibly short space, the ten thousand warriors were broken and scattered, pursued by the avenging steel of the Spaniards. They took to the larger lake, where they had canoes concealed in the rushes, but nine hundred men, the flower of Vitachuco's army, were forced into the small, deep lake, where they could not escape. Now ensued a battle which has few parallels. The water was too deep for wading, but these gallant men gathered in groups of five, four clinging together and supporting themselves by swimming, while the fifth, mounting upon their shoulders, plied his bow until the quiver was empty. Then another took his place, and continued the battle throughout that weary day.

The Spaniards surrounded the lake, and tried every means to induce these gallant men to surrender, but they only replied by new flights of arrows, taunting the Spaniards with their inability to reach them, while the troopers circled about the lake, making occasional shots with their cross-bows, driving the Indians back to the center of the basin whenever they attempted to escape.

It was far into the night when the first group gave up, but when morning broke, seven of these indomitable spirits still remained in the water and refused to yield.

"These men must not die," cried De Soto. "Such bravery deserves a better recompense than such a death. Who among you will swim out and drag them to the shore?"

A dozen swimmers threw off their arms and clothing and plunged into the lake. The Indians had been *thirty-six* hours in the water, and were so weak that they could not support themselves much longer, far less offer effectual resistance to the strong-armed troopers. They were seized and dragged to the bank, where they lay for some time extended with little appearance of life.

"Why have you done this?" said De Soto, as one of them began to show signs of life.

"We seven are captains," replied the warrior; "chosen as such because we are brave. A task has been given us by our great cacique, and we have failed to perform it. If you wish to do us a favor and make us love you, slay us where we are, great white man, for since Vitachuco is taken we are no longer worthy to appear before him or to live in the world."

De Soto was still gazing admiringly upon the face of the speaker, when a great outcry was heard, and Garcia entered the camp, leading with him as a prisoner the unknown warrior, in his mail.

CHAPTER XIII.

OZEMBA'S CHOICE.

From the beginning of the fray, Garcia had not suffered his eyes to leave the person of the Unknown, for he had registered a vow to finish the fight which had been left unaccomplished in the duel in the swamp. The Unknown had gathered a great body of the Indians in the edge of a woods of small extent, and here they were hemmed in by a body of Spanish arquebusiers under the leadership of Garcia, who vainly entreated them to surrender. But, keeping their position under cover of the trees, they beat back every assault, performing deeds of valor worthy of their name and race. Foremost among them, fighting with the reckless bravery which had

ever distinguished him, stood the Unknown. His polished ax waved in the air, and beat back every assault, until Garcia, out of patience, ordered the pikemen to advance and sweep the wood, while he led them, ax in hand. A desperate struggle now ensued, and the Unknown, fighting hand to hand with Nuno Tobar, was surrounded by the Spaniards and taken prisoner by Garcia, to whom alone he would give up his ax.

"You have conquered me," he said; "but fate is with you. I give up the ax, and from this hour I will never more take a weapon in my hand."

"Say not so!" said Nuno Tobar, "for a braver warrior never fought in the front of a battle. What say you: will you go to De Soto at once, or remain in our camp to-night?"

"I will stay here, if you promise that I shall not be forced to remove my visor."

"You have my word," said Garcia, "and I never broke it yet."

"I am satisfied," said the Unknown. "When the morning comes you shall know me as I am."

They were soon seated beside the camp fire, and began to talk.

"You spoke once of Ozemba, warrior," said Garcia. "What can you tell me of her?"

"We are of the same blood," said the Unknown, "and I only laughed at you when I said that I had the best claim to her regard. Fifteen years ago—it was fifteen years ago when Cortez destroyed Guatemozin, was it not?"

"Ay," said Garcia. "I was with him, though a mere boy at the time."

"Cortez conquered, as he always conquered. The brother of Guatemozin fled and took Ozemba with him, then a child eight years of age. They reached the coast, and there good friends had a great canoe in waiting, and in it they placed the little wealth which the conqueror had left them, and among the rest, two suits of armor which Cortez had given him before they became enemies. The winds of the gulf cast the father and child upon the shore, near Apalachee, and they wandered from tribe to tribe until they reached the village where we now dwell, and the noble father of Vitacheco gave

them a refuge. While he lived the father never talked of any thing save the Spaniards and his wrongs. He taught Ozemba to hate them, and told her that if the time ever came when this good tribe was threatened, to help drive out the invaders. Then he died and Ozemba became a princess of this tribe. The white men came and the oath she swore to her father was performed. She has done what she could, but Vitachuco is a prisoner and his banner is in the dust. I will fight no more."

They would have questioned him further, but he shook his head, and making a pillow of a shield, lay down beneath the shelter of a great oak. When morning broke and the last prisoner had been taken, Garcia brought the Unknown to De Soto.

"You have made a prisoner I wished very much to see," said De Soto, approaching and speaking rapidly and almost fiercely. "I can forgive a brave Indian who fights for his land, but not a renegade white man. Who and what are you?"

"No renegade, great cacique," said the Unknown. "Your enemy, it is true, but one who has fought fairly."

"Let me see your face, then," said De Soto. "If you are not a white man I will ask your pardon for daring to doubt you."

"You *will* see my face?"

"I insist upon it."

"You shall. Open my visor," said the Unknown, turning to Garcia. "You and no other, for I am *your* prisoner."

Garcia hastily unfastened the clasps of the casque and threw it to the ground. As he did so he uttered a wild cry of astonishment, for in the brave warrior who had fought so well, the one who had so nearly conquered him, who had faced Nuno Tobar, Porcalla and others so boldly, he saw Ozemba!

The Warrior Princess uttered a low laugh as she saw the startled look upon every face.

"I have shamed you, warriors all," she said, "because you thought that a woman's hand could not strike for her country. My father, when he made me swear to oppose to the death any white men who set foot upon these shores, taught me how to fight. For the sake of the last victim of the hate and av

rice of Cortez in his latest expedition, my father hated him most, and from a little child, he made me strong and skillful enough to fight against the enemy. You shall testify whether I have fought well."

"I will testify before the throne of Spain that I never heard of any thing so brave," said De Soto. "Garcia, you have won a noble prisoner; see that you treat her well. She might well be called Zenobia."

"She is to be my wife, De Soto, and I will teach her how to love where once she hated. Shall it not be so, my princess? Remember your promise to me."

"My promise?"

"When Vitachuco is conquered, and his pride in the dust, I will take your hand and be your wife." These were your words."

"My word is given and will not be recalled if you will keep your promise."

"And that promise—"

"To fight no more against the Indians."

Garcia looked at De Soto entreatingly.

"I can not desert my colors," he said.

"Nor need you do so, Garcia. Some one must go to Espiritu Santo with orders for the commandant of that post, and I design yourself and Nuno Tobar for the service. When you reach the coast, you will take command of the ships left there, and sail for Havana with dispatches which I shall give you, which will also contain instructions to my wife; she will communicate the same to you."

Garcia bent his knee to thank the Governor, for he felt convinced that he had contrived this expedition for his sake.

An hour after, the troops were on the march for the village, where they took up their quarters, as before.

The prisoners, nearly equal in number to the soldiery, were divided among the men—De Soto himself taking charge of Vitachuco, though not as a slave. He was treated as a guest in most respects, although closely watched lest he should attempt to escape.

Upon reaching the dwelling of the cacique, Ozemba at once disappeared, and when they saw her again she was dressed in

woman's garb, and came in with her arm thrown protectingly about the waist of Isabel de Tobar.

"I have been a *warrior* so long that I must learn a *woman's* duty," she said, in her soft, melodious voice. "Isabel will teach me; she is very kind."

"You have little to learn, dear Ozemba," said Isabel, returning her caresses. "I am glad that you are going to Havana with us, and we will make you a noble lady. There is Garcia; go to him."

"No, no," said Ozemba, blushing. "Do you think that he can love me when he knows that I have fought with men in armor?"

"Hear you this, Garcia?" said Isabel, laughing. "Ozemba fears that you can not love her because she has been too brave."

"We shall see to that," said Garcia, coming near and taking her hand. "Sweet one, I shudder when I think that we were face to face in battle, and that my hand might have laid you low."

Isabel disappeared and left them together; but as they stood, with clasped hands, looking into each other's eyes, Vitachuco came in, following the Governor.

He started, and uttered a low cry of surprise and rage.

"You see this, white man—you, who pretend to be so just! This woman was to have been my wife. I loved her as the eagle loves the sunlight. I have lost all; I am a slave, and now behold, the one hope I had is taken from me."

"She shall choose between you," said De Soto, "and upon my honor if she chooses you, no power on earth shall part you. Look at me, Ozemba. Here stands the cacique, Vitachuco, a brave warrior, and one who has been kind to you. There is Garcia La Vega, a gallant gentleman, and *my* friend. Both love you, and it is for you to say which of them shall be your husband."

"Love can not be bought or sold," said Ozemba, laying her hand again in that of Garcia, who caught her to his breast. "I have chosen *here*."

Vitachuco stood glaring at the pair with demoniac rage in his dark eyes, his hands opening and closing convulsively. At last, he drew a long breath.

"It is finished," he said; "Ozemba has chosen, and Vitachuco has nothing left but to die."

"Ozemba can only leave my camp as your wife, Garcia," said De Soto. "In two days you will be married by my confessor, and leave for the coast. Vitachuco, come with me."

It was the morning of the third day. Vitachuco had stood beneath the shelter of his audience-chamber, while the priest pronounced Garcia La Vega and Ozemba man and wife.

His stern, set face did not change, but there was ferocious joy in his heart, for he had formed a plan to wreak wholesale destruction upon his enemies.

His pages, four in number, had been busy during the past two days, passing from man to man among the Indian slaves, whispering the orders of the chief.

Each man, at a given signal, was to spring upon his master and kill him with any weapon he could grasp, and Vitachuco would begin with De Soto.

The bridal feast was nearly ended, and De Soto arose to propose the health of the noble pair.

At this moment the cacique, who had been seated beside him, sprung suddenly to his feet, and dealt the Governor a blow which felled him senseless to the earth.

Giving the signal whoop, at which the attack was to commence, the cacique leaped upon the prostrate form of De Soto, to complete his work; but, before he could strike again, the sword of Nuno Tobar passed through his body, and he fell, cursing the spirits of the air for having foiled him in his plan for vengeance.

For an hour the camp was a scene of slaughter. The Spaniards, after the first surprise, caught up their weapons, and when the tiger strife was over scarcely twenty of the revolted slaves remained alive.

Vitachuco, in dying, had left a frightful monument to his memory.

With the morning light, forty of the bravest lances in the army marched with Nuno Tobar and Garcia as leaders. Between them, riding a steed that had been given her by De Soto,

and wearing her armor, was Ozemba. At Tobar's left hand, also clad in armor, rode Isabel, in her page's dress. Before them lay the wilderness, through which the army had forced its way, and through which they must pass to reach the bay of Espiritu Santo. They parted from the army with many regrets, little dreaming, as they pressed De Soto's hand, that the gallant leader, after crossing half a continent, would find a grave beneath the turbid waters of the Mississippi.

The perils of the journey of the brave forty lances might fill a volume. After many days of toil and strife, in which Ozemba bore the part of a heroine, they reached the shelter of Mucuzco's village, and from thence passed on to Espiritu Santo, where Pedro Calderon, the captain left in charge, received them joyfully.

A week after, the ships sailed, and Garcia La Vega, standing on the quarter-deck of his ship, with his wife and friends beside him, waved his commander a long farewell; while Calderon, obeying the orders of his leader, marched to join him in the country, leagues away.

When Garcia reached Havana, and his orders were read, they told him to remain two months in Havana, and then, leaving his wife in the care of De Soto's lady, to sail to the Bay of Achusi, and there meet the army. He obeyed the order, and parting with his wife, reached the port in safety, but De Soto had not come, and as winter set in, he returned to Havana. Under the fostering care of the Dona and Isabel, Ozemba had become a noble lady, and none, to look at her beautiful face, would have thought that the best years of her life had been spent in the Everglades.

For four years, as spring approached, this gallant man sailed in quest of De Soto. Each year he returned disappointed, until, in 1543, after months of fruitless search, he entered the harbor of Vera Cruz, and there learned, to his horror and dismay, that, out of one thousand gallant men who set out on the expedition full of life and hope, but three hundred in rage and misery had at length escaped, and that De Soto, the master spirit of the expedition, lay beneath the waters of the great river. They sailed with sorrowing hearts, to carry the sad news to Cuba.

Dona Isabel had loved her husband well, and her broken

heart found rest in the grave. Nuno Tobar and his wife, Garcia and Ozemba, repaired to New Spain and there made themselves famous, and contributed to the best blood of Mexico. And the Warrior Princess, a happy wife and mother sitting under the vines of her beautiful home, looked back upon her early life as a troubled dream.



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